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THE REPROACH OF ANNESLEY

A NOVEL

1889
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BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND," ETC

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THE REPROACH OF ANNESLEY.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

FOOTSTEPS.

SILENCE and solitude reigned all around; a solitude invaded by the appearance of no living creatures save distant flocks of sheep dotted at large over upland pastures or grouped in wattled folds; a silence rather deepened than broken by the peculiar and by no means unmusical sound of the wind sweeping through the short pale-yellow bents which rose sparsely above the fine rich down-turf. The narrow, white high-road ran straight along the summit of the down; it was unfenced on one side where the turf sloped so abruptly towards a rich cultivated level as to make this almost invisible from the road, and on the other bounded by a bank, purple in summer with wild thyme, and crested by a high quickset hedge, which effectually concealed the northern slope of the down and the wooded country beneath it spreading away to the sea. This thorn hedge, which, in default of leaves and blossoms, bore masses of thick and hoary lichen, instead of growing erect from its bank, running nearly east and west, was arched over to the north-east in an accurate curve, due to the fierce briny sweep of the prevailing winds, and was by the same agency smoothly shorn on the windward side. These strong salt winds, blowing off the sea and frequently rising to gales, give all the trees and hedges within their influence a marked family likeness, stunting their growth, and forcing them to bow to the north-east as if suddenly made rigid in the height of a south-west gale.

But the salt south-west was silent on this cloudy March afternoon, and in its place a bleak east wind, whirling the white dust from the flinty chalk road, and quieting gradually down as the sun drew nearer the west, was sweeping over the short turf with its low, lonely sound, which is half whistle and half moan.

rich level to the south of the down, sprinkled though it was with occasional farms, each having its cluster of ricks and elm-trees, and varied here and there by a village spire rising from a little circle of thatched roofs, looked solitary beneath the grey sky. It terminated on the east in some picturesquely broken hills, interrupted by a long, level grey band, which was the sea, and on the south in more hills of moderate height and irregular outline, which derived an unusual grandeur this afternoon from the deep purple shadows resting upon them, and emphasizing their contour against the silvery grey sky, a sky full of latent light. On the west again there were hills of gentler outline, beyond these little glimpses of plain and woodland, and on the farthest limit a curving break filled with a polished surface of sea, reflecting the dim yellow lustre of the declining sun, which glowed faintly through the curdling clouds above.

The wind went on singing its strange low song to the bleak down-land; the far-off farms and villages gave no sign of life; but one solitary sea-gull sailed slowly by on its wide, unearthly-looking wings far below the level of the high-road, yet far above the plain beneath, uttering its complaining cry, and receiving the pale reflected sun-rays upon its cream-white plumage, thus making a centre of light upon the purply-grey darkness of the plain and the hills. It passed gradually out of sight, and the silence seemed more death-like than before.

Yet life and music were near, and only awaiting the summons of soft airs and warm sunbeams to spring forth and make the earth glad with beauty and melody. The gnarled, storm-bent thorns were showing tiny leaf-buds on their brown branches where the tangled grey lichens did not usurp their place; cowslips were pushing little satiny spirals through the short turf on the hedge-banks; down in the copses, and beneath sheltered hedge-rows, primroses were showing their sweet, pensive faces, and white violets were budding. Many a nest was already built; many a bird already felt the welcome pressure of eggs beneath its warm breast and tasted the fulness of the spring-time; the tall elms on the plain already wore their warm purple robe of blossom; black buds on grey ash-stems in the copses were swelling to bursting-point above the primroses. Yet all seemed lifeless; the red-brown leaves on the oak boughs shivered in the blast; it was scarcely possible to prophesy of the green and golden glory that would clothe them in one brief month. Could those dry bones live?

Presently something black rose silently and swiftly above the green turf border of the chalk road. Beneath it appeared a human

face, next a pair of broad shoulders, and finally the whole figure of a man emerged, as if from the heart of the earth, and stood fully outlined against the chill sky.

He was young, and strongly rather than gracefully built; the keen wind, from which he did not flinch by so much as an eye-blink, imparted a healthy pink to his clear complexion. His fair hair was crisped by the wind, and his grey eyes looked all round the wide scene, on which his back had been turned while stepping lightly up the down, in a singular manner. Instead of gazing straightforward like other people's they looked downwards from beneath his eyelids, as if he had difficulty in raising the latter. Having rapidly surveyed earth, sea and sky, he turned and walked westwards along the edge of turf by the road, so that his footsteps still made no sound, drew a watch from his pocket, then replaced it beneath his warm overcoat, muttering to himself, "Early yet."

Soon he heard a sound as of a multitudinous scraping and panting, above which tinkled a bell; a cloud of dust rose from the road, showing as it parted the yellow fleeces and black legs and muzzles of a flock of Southdown sheep. He stood aside motionless upon the turf, to let them pass without hindrance; but one of the timid creatures, nevertheless, took fright at him, and darted down the slope, followed by an unreasoning crowd of imitators. It did not need a low faint cry from the shepherd, who loomed far behind above the cloud of white dust, himself spectral-looking in his long, greyish-white smock-frock, to send the sheep-dog sweeping over the turf, with his fringes floating in the wind, and his tongue hanging from his formidable jaws, while he uttered short angry barks of reproof, and drove the truants into the right path again. But again and yet again some indiscretion on the part of the timid little black-faces demanded the energies of their lively and fussy guardian, who darted from one end of the flock to the other with joyous rapidity, hustling this sheep, grumbling at that, barking here, remonstrating there, and driving the bewildered creatures hither and thither with a zeal that was occasionally in excess, and drew forth a brief monosyllable from his master, which caused the dog to fly back and walk sedately behind him with an instant obedience as delightful as his intelligent activity. The actual commander of this host of living things gave little sign of energy, but walked heavily behind his charges with a slow and slouching gait, partially supporting himself o his long crooked stick, and carrying under his left arm a la which bleated in the purposeless way characteristic of th creatures. Yet the shepherd's gaze was everywhere, an

like his zealous lieutenant, the dog, could distinguish each of these numerous and apparently featureless creatures from the other, and every now and then a slight motion of his crook, or some inarticulate sound, conveyed a whole code of instructions to the eager watchful dog, who straightway acted upon them. All this the young man motionless on the turf watched with interest, as if a flock of sheep were something uncommon or worthy of contemplation; and when they had all gone by, and the shepherd himself passed in review, his yellow sun-bleached beard shaken by the keen wind he was facing, he transferred his attention to him.

"Blusterous," said the shepherd, making his crook approach his battered felt hat, when he came up with him.

"Very blusterous," answered the gentleman, nodding in a friendly manner and going on his way.

This was their whole conversation, and yet the shepherd pondered upon it for miles, and recounted it to his wife as one of the day's chief incidents.

"And I zes to 'n, 'Blusterous'—I zes; and he zes to me, 'Terble blusterous,' he zes. Ay, that's what 'ee zed, zure enough," he repeated, with infinitesimal variations, while smoking his after-supper pipe in his chimney-corner.

Thus, you see, human intercourse may be carried on in these parts of the earth with a moderate expenditure of words.

Gervase Rickman went his way pondering upon the shepherd and his flock. How foolishly helpless and helplessly foolish the bleating innocent-faced sheep looked, as they blundered aimlessly out of the road, one blindly following the next in front with such lack of purpose, that the wonder was that here and there a solitary sheep should have sufficient intellect to strike on a fresh path and mislead his fellows. And how abject they were to the superior intellect and volition of the dog; how tumultuously they fled before him, thus involving themselves in fresh disorder; how tamely they yielded to his behests, when so small an exercise of will on the part of each might have baffled him, in spite of his terrible fangs; above all, how like, how very like the mass of mankind, "the common herd," as they were so aptly called, they seemed to his musing fancy!

With what a sheep-like fidelity do men follow the few who from time to time blunder upon original paths, how blindly do they pursue them to unknown goals, and how abjectly do multitudes permit themselves to be swayed by the will of one with sufficient daring, energy, and intellect to dominate them! The mass needs a man, a strong personality, a powerful volition

to lead it; it bows to the strongest, to a Moses, a Cæsar, a Gregory, a Charlemain, a Cromwell or a Napoleon; democracy is but the shadow of a shade—the aimless revolt of the aimless many against shackles that have been silently forged in the process of the ages—a revolt ending in the incoherence of anarchy, weltering helplessly on till one is born strong enough to lead and create anew; then the centuries solder and cement his work, and give it a fleeting permanence, and thus a civilization is born. Or the centuries refuse their sanction, and the work slowly resolves itself again to chaos. So Gervase Rickman mused.

But he was not of the herd; he would follow none. He felt within himself an intensity of purpose, and a passion of concentration, together with a strength of intellect that must lift him above his fellows. So he thought and mused, not knowing what was within him and into what channels the current of his character would set.

He went on his way, still keeping to the turf, and thus still silently, for it was his habit to move with as little sound as possible, until a barrow rose steeply before him and compelled him to take the road. He was now approaching the end of the down road, at the extremity of which, where the thorn hedge ended, there stood a little lonely inn in an empty courtyard, fenced by a low stone wall. On one side of the small house was a tree, bending as usual to the north-east, and imparting that air of perfect loneliness which the presence of a single tree invariably gives to an isolated building. The inn proclaimed itself the "Traveller's Rest" by a sign over its low porch and closed door. There were no flowers in the little court, though it faced the south; neither tree nor vegetable grew in the barren enclosure, which was tenanted solely by a large deer-hound stretched in a watchful attitude before the porch.

Mr. Rickman did not look at the inn, though a side glance of his eyes took in the dog with a sparkle of satisfaction; while the dog on hearing his footsteps, which were also faintly audible to two women in an upper room, slightly pricked his ears and looked at him with an indifferent air, dropping his muzzle comfortably on to his fore-paws again when he had passed.

Another road crossed the level chalk road at right angles just beyond the solitary inn. Opposite the inn-front on the turf was a stagnant pond, the milky water of which was crisped to ripples by the keen wind, and in the angle formed by two roads stood a wooden sign-post.

When he reached the sign-post, Gervase Rickman leant against it with his back towards the inn, which was now some distance

from him, and gazed over the broad expanse of level champain to the dark hills, on the broken slopes of which the shadows were shifting. He did not appear to mind the wind, which caught him full in the side of the face, ruffled his hair, and obliged him to press his low felt hat more firmly over his brows; the sound it made among the withered stalks above the sward pleased him, and he mused and mused in the stillness, an image of peaceful contemplation, with his refined features and look of quiet concentrated power.

While he was thus musing, his quick ears caught the sound of footsteps in the distance behind him; but he did not turn his head, for the footsteps were those of a stranger and could not interest him, so he thought. They were the firm elastic steps of a man in the flower of life, they smote the hard road with an even joyous rhythm, and were accompanied by the clear cheery tones of a voice singing,

"As we lay, all the day,
In the Bay of Biscay, O!"

Both song and footsteps penetrated to the quiet upper chamber in the inn, where two women sat together, one wasted with mortal sickness and wearing the unnatural rose of fever in her face, the other radiant with youth and health. The latter paused in her reading and looked up as the strain of manly song broke upon the quiet of the sick room; the invalid's face brightened, and she said it was a pleasant song.

"It is a good voice," said the reader, "and the voice of a gentleman."

The singer went joyously on his way, and paused in his song when he saw the motionless figure at the foot of the sign-post. Gervase Rickman still gazed dreamily away over the valley to the dark hills. A man has but to purpose a thing strongly to gain his purpose, he was thinking; fate is but the shadow of an old savage dream; a man's life is in his own hands. In fancy he saw the flock of sheep driven on and on along the dusty highway by the shepherd, whose figure suggested all sorts of images to his mind, save the august image of the Shepherd of mankind.

"To Medington four-and-a-half miles," was written on one of the arms of the sign-post above his head, and the pedestrian reading this, paused a moment and looked at the silent figure beneath, which with averted gaze appeared unconscious of his approach.

"Is this the only road to Medington?" he asked.

"No; there are four," replied Rickman, facing about, but not

meeting the level gaze of the stranger, as he replied to his salutation.

"Which takes me past Arden Manor?" asked the stranger, who looked as if he would enjoy a friendly chat.

"Neither."

"Surely that is Arden Manor I saw lying beneath the down by the church as I came along?"

"Yes."

"An old gentleman named Rickman lives there, I think; a queer old dry-as-dust of a fellow, who collects antiquities."

"A Mr. Rickman, F.R.S., lives there," replied Gervase, with a dry smile; "he also collects beetles. You are perhaps a brother naturalist or antiquary?"

"I know a beetle from a butterfly and that's about all," he said. "No; I was to go over the downs from Oakwell and meet a friend by Arden Manor on the road to Medington. I have evidently gone wrong."

"No: you are quite right. If you keep straight on you will come to Arden Cross at the foot of the hill. For Arden Manor you turn to the left, but that takes you away from Medington. Turn up the lane to the right, and you go direct over the downs to Medington, or straight on by the high-road you get to Medington."

"Paul meant Arden Cross," reflected the stranger aloud. "Thank you. I remember the down path now, that is the short cut. Can you help me to a light? This wind is too much for matches."

Gervase opened his jacket, and in the shelter thus made the stranger, stooping, for he was tall, struck a match and lighted a short pipe, thus giving the other the opportunity of a close and unobserved scrutiny of his face in the glow of the match. It was a dark, healthy, well-favoured face, on the whole the kind of face that goes to the heart of every woman, old or young.

"A good-looking fool," thought Gervase, consigning him mentally to the majority of mankind. "Edward Annesley, no doubt; an officer, by his moustache and swagger."

He was wrong about the swagger: though the stranger walked like a soldier. Having lighted his pipe, the officer, thanking him for his courtesy, went on his way down the hill, and was lost to sight before the sound of his footsteps ceased to ring upon the hard road, Rickman looking after him with a superior sort of smile, until the sound of other steps approaching from behind stirred every fibre within him, and lit a flame in his veiled grey eyes. On came the steps, swift, light, and even, very different

from the soldier's firm strides, though telling like them of youth, health, and a light heart; yet Gervase, for all the stir of feeling they evoked within him, appeared to take no notice of them, but continued his rapt contemplation of the shadowed hill-slopes, brightened now by long moted shafts of light from the sinking sun, around which the clouds were breaking away in beautiful glory as the keen wind stilled itself more and more in shifting to a warmer quarter.

A voice soon accompanied the light footsteps, echoing in a woman's round, clear notes, the soldier's song:

"There we lay, all the day,
In the Bay of Biscay, O!"

At this point Mr. Rickman left the post against which he had so long been leaning, and strolled quietly on without turning his head, while the singer, who made rapid progress, repeated her snatch of song, and the hound, which had been lying before the inn-door, flew before and around her in widening sweeps, all the grace and strength of its lithe slender body showing to the utmost advantage, until it included Gervase in its gyrations, whereupon he turned and waited, while a tall young woman came up with him.

"I thought you would never see me, Gervase," she said. "What deadly schemes were you meditating under the sign-post?"

"I was watching the weather," he replied; "the wind is chopping round, we shall have a change. Where have you been?"

"With Ellen Gale; I am glad for her sake the wind is changing, the east wind is so bad for her."

She came between Gervase and the setting sun, which grew more radiant each moment, and now sent forth a dazzling mesh of golden rays to tangle themselves in the fine growth of curling hairs roughed by the wind from her rich plaits beneath, thus forming a saint-like halo around the face of Alice Lingard, a face distinguished by that indefinable charm, which is the very essence of beauty, and yet is often wanting in the most perfect features. It was a charm which went to the very heart of the young man walking by her side, and yet which he could not describe; he knew only that it was lacking to every other face he had ever seen; he knew also that it was not given to every one to discover that hidden grace. For each face has its own charm, the magic of which has different power over different

people, and enchants many or few, according to its own intrinsic potency.

The two walked on together at Alice's brisker pace, talking with the unconstraint of familiar friends; Alice involved in the glory of the warm sun-rays, while a deeper rose bloomed in her face as the fresh air touched it, and her blood warmed with the exercise; Gervase for the most part listening, and monosyllabic.

They passed a large deserted chalk quarry, its steep cliff-sides looking ghost-like, save where a stray sunbeam shot its long gold lustre upon them, and then they came round the shoulder of the down and saw, nestling beneath it, a church with a low, square, grey tower and a gabled stone house sheltered from the south-west by a row of weather-beaten Scotch firs; lower down along the valley ran a straggling village, all thatch and greenery. Then they left the chalk, and dipped into a deep sandy lane with steep banks and overhanging hedges, and here in sheltered nooks primroses were looking shyly forth, and violets were pushing tiny buds to the light.

"But not a violet is out yet," said Alice.

This was the moment of Gervase's triumph. He took from a deep pocket a something carefully folded in a leaf, and, uncovering it, presented to his companion, with a quiet smile, a little posy of white violets, pink-tipped, and set in a gleaming circle of leaves.

She took it with an exclamation of pleasure, and lifted it to her fresh face to inhale its delicate fragrance. "To think that you should find the first!" she said, half jealously.

He was in the seventh heaven, but said nothing. He had secretly watched the budding of those violets for a week, and walked far and quickly to gather them for her that afternoon, and now he had his reward in seeing her caress the flowers and talk of them for a good five minutes, till the sound of hoofs along the lane behind them made her look up.

CHAPTER II.

FIRE-LIGHT.

THE rapid beat of hoofs and the roll of wheels drew nearer and nearer, and a dog-cart drawn by a serviceable cob flashed down the hill towards the pedestrians with many a scattered pebble and spark of fire, for the dusk was now falling.

On reaching them, the driver pulled up the cob, gave the reins to the groom, sprang to the ground, all in a flash of time, and was shaking hands with Gervase and Alice, and walking by their side almost before they had time to recognize him. Alice gave him a frank smile of welcome, and Gervase smiled too, but he murmured something inaudibly to himself that was not flattering to the new-comer.

The latter was a young man, with a dark, strong, intelligent face, which had just missed being handsome. He walked well, dressed well, and had about him a certain air which would have challenged attention anywhere. He did not look like a parish doctor.

"And how are they all at Arden?" he asked, in a full cordial voice. "Where *did* you get those violets? It is enough to make a man mad. I thought these were the first." And he drew a second little bunch of white violets from his breast-pocket and gave them to Alice, who received them with another frank smile.

"How kind of you to think of me!" she said. "Gervase found these, but he was only five minutes ahead of you."

Gervase smiled inwardly; the new-comer's face darkened and he silently returned the rude observation the former had made upon him a moment before; and then comforted himself by the reflection, "Gervase is nobody."

"So you have been visiting my patients again, Miss Lingard," he said aloud; "you must not go about making people well in this reckless way. How are we poor doctors to live?"

"Did you find Ellen any better?" she asked.

"She was wonderfully perked up, as the cottagers say; I knew you had been there, without any telling. We must try to get her

through the spring winds. I say, Rickman, you haven't seen such a thing as a stray cousin anywhere about, have you?"

"I did catch sight of such a creature half-an-hour since," he replied. "He asked me the way to Medington by Arden Manor, where one Paul, it appeared, had agreed to meet him."

"A tall, good-looking fellow with a pleasant face——"

"And a beautiful voice," interrupted Alice. "It must be the gentleman I heard singing past the 'Traveller's Rest,' Gervase. I was just going to ask if you had seen him."

"He sings like a nightingale. Yes; that was no doubt Ted. Oh! you will all like him. I shall bring him over to the Manor, if I can. I don't say if I may," he added with a smile.

"Because you know we are always pleased to see your friends," returned Gervase. "But your cousin is an old friend of ours, Annesley, and evidently remembered us. He asked if a queer old fellow named Rickman lived in Arden Manor down there."

"The rascal! Did you tell him he was speaking to the queer old fellow's son?"

"Not I. I wanted to hear what he would say about us."

"What a shame?" said Alice; "those are the bad underhand ways Sibyl and I are always trying to overcome in you. Well, Dr. Annesley, here is Arden Cross, but no cousin, apparently."

"He would be well over St. Michael's Down by this time," added Gervase. "But who is this, coming down the lane?"

Two figures emerged from the deeply-shadowed lane which led from the down to the paler dusk of the cross-roads, and discovered themselves to be an elderly labouring man and a youth, who touched their hats and then stopped.

"Evening, miss; evening, sir. Ben up hoam, Dacter? Poor Eln was terble bad 's marning," said the elder, who was no other than the host of the "Traveller's Rest," Jacob Gale.

"Ellen was better," replied the doctor cheerfully.

"Oh! yes; she was really quite bright when I saw her," added Alice, in a still more encouraging voice.

The man shook his head. "She won't never be better," he growled, "though she med perk up a bit along of seeing you, miss. I've a zin too many goo that way to be took in, bless your heart. How long do ye give her, Dacter? I baint in no hurry vur she to goo, as I knows on," he added, with a view to contradict erroneous impressions.

The doctor replied that it was impossible to say; she might linger for months, or she might go that night.

"They all goos the zame way," continued the man, "one after t'other, nothun caint stop em. There was no pearter mayde

about than our Eln a year ago come Middlemass, a vine-growed mayde she was as ever I zeen," he repeated in a rough voice, through which the very breath of tragedy sighed; "zing she 'ood like a thrush, and her chakes like a hrose. A peart mayde was our Eln, I war'nt she was."

"She is very happy; she is willing to go," said Alice, trying to comfort him.

"Ah! they all goos off asy. My missus she went fust; a vine vigure of a ooman, too. Vive on 'em lies down Church-lytten there, Miss Lingard, and all in brick graves, buried comfortable. They've a got to goo and they goos. Hreuben here, he'll hae to go next. There's the hred in 's chakes, and he coughs terble aready."

Reuben smiled pensively; he was a handsome lad, with dark eyes and a delicate yet brilliant pink-and-white complexion.

"Nonsense," interposed Paul, "Reuben's well enough. You shouldn't frighten the boy. Give him good food, and his cough will soon go. Don't you believe him, Reuben. You are only growing fast."

"He'll hae to goo long with t'others," continued the father, "dacters ain't no good agen a decline. A power of dacter's stuff ben inside of they that's gone. They've all got to goo, all got to goo."

"Reckon I'll hae to goo," added Reuben, in a more cheerful refrain to his father's melancholy chant.

Alice tried in vain to reason the pair into a more hopeful frame of mind, and then scolded them, and finally bid them good-night, and they parted, the heavy boots of the two Gales striking the road in slow funereal beats as they trudged wearily up-hill, the lighter steps of the gentlefolk making swift and merry music downwards.

"Oh, Paul!" said Alice, turning to him after a backward glance at the father and son, "we must save Reuben; we cannot let him die!"

"My dear Alice, you must not take all the illnesses in the parish to heart," interposed Gervase; "the boy will be all right, as Annesley told him. Why try to deprive Gale of his chief earthly solace? The old fellow revels in his own miseries. It is a kind of distinction to that class of people to have a fatal disease in their family."

"Hereditary too," added Paul; "as respectable as a family ghost in higher circles."

"Or the curse of Gledesworth. I am glad the curse does not blight the tenants as well as the landlord," continued Gervase. For Arden Manor belonged to the Gledesworth estate.

"Or the Mowbray temper," laughed Paul. "Nay, dear Miss Lingard, do not look so reproachful. I am doing my best for Reuben. But he is consumptive, and I doubt if he will stand another winter, though his lungs are still whole. We must try to accept facts. Why, we poor doctors would be fretted to fiddle-strings in a month if we did not harden our hearts to the inevitable."

"But is this inevitable?" asked Alice, with an earnest gaze into his dark-blue eyes that set his heart throbbing. "Need this bright young life be thrown away? I know how good your heart is, and how you often feel most when you speak most roughly. But if Reuben were Gervase, you know that he would not have to die."

"You mean that I should order Gervase to the South. Doubtless."

"Very well. And if we set our wits to work we may expatriate Reuben. We must. Gervase, you are great at schemes. Scheme Reuben into a warm climate before next winter."

"We have received our orders, Annesley," replied Gervase, laughing, as they turned up a broad lane, at the end of which the grey manor house, with its gables and mullioned windows, loomed massive in the dusk—a dusk deepened on one side by the row of wind-bowed firs.

Paul accompanied them, as a matter of course, though he had turned quite out of his homeward way; while his servant, without asking or receiving orders, drove the dog-cart round to the stable-yard, whither the cob would have found his way alone, so accustomed was he to its welcome hospitality.

Through the gateway, with its stone piers topped by stone globes, and up the drive bounded by velvet turf of at least a century's growth, the three walked in the deepening dusk, and saw a ruddy glow in the uncurtained windows of the hall, round the porch of which myrtle grew mingled with ivy and roses. Gervase opened the door, and they entered a spacious hall wainscotted in oak, carved about the doorways and the broad chimney-piece, beneath which, on the open hearth, burnt a fire of wood. The leaping flames danced merrily on the polished walls; on a broad staircase shining and slippery with beeswax and the labour of generations; on a few old pictures, some trophies of armour and some oaken settles and chairs of an old quaint fashion; and upon a table near the hearth, on which a tea-service was set out.

An elderly lady sat by the fire, knitting and occasionally talking, for want of a better listener, to a cat sitting bolt upright in front of the fire, into which it stared, as if inquiring of some potent oracle, and sometimes turning its head with a blissful wink, in

response to its mistress's voice. This lady was small and slight, with a rosy, unwrinkled face, grey hair, and an expression so innocent and sweet as to be almost childlike, yet she resembled Gervase sufficiently to prove herself his mother. Mrs. Rickman's grammar was hazy and her spelling uncertain; she was not sure if metaphysics were a science or an instrument; she habitually curtsied to the new moon, and did nothing important on a Friday (which sometimes caused serious domestic inconvenience); but her manners were such as immediately put all who addressed her at their ease, and her pleasant uncritical smile encouraged, even invited, people to tell her their troubles and confess their misdoings.

"Come, children," she said cheerily, rising when the door opened to busy herself at the table, "here is tea just made. What, Paul? I did not see you in the dusk. We have not seen you for an age, three days at least. Gervase, throw me on a fresh log, my dear."

"We certainly deserve no tea at this time of night," said Alice, who was busy laying aside her hat and furs. "Come, Hubert, leave the doctor alone and lie down by Puss."

The deer-hound, who had been fawning on Paul, stretched himself on the rug on one side of the fire, not daring to take the middle, since Puss disdained to move so much as a paw to make way for the new-comer.

Alice took the chair Gervase placed for her, and began showing Mrs. Rickman her two bunches of violets, one of which she put in water, and the other (Paul observed with a thrill that it was his) in her dress.

"And where are Mr. Rickman and Sibyl?" he asked, flushing with a secret joy, while Gervase was deeply pondering the disposition of the violets, and persuading himself that his bunch was the more cherished, since it was secured from fading, and yet not quite sure on the point.

"Sibyl is at the parsonage practising with the choir," said Mrs. Rickman. "Mr. Rickman is on the downs examining some barrows which have just been opened, and no one knows when he will be back. Alice, my dear child, what a fearful state your hair is in!"

Alice put up her hands with a futile attempt to smooth her curly wind-blown hair. "It doesn't matter in the firelight," she replied.

"Miss Lingard is quite right about the firelight," said Paul, in his stately manner. "An elegant negligence suits best with this idle moment in the dusk. Yes, if you forgive my saying so, Alice,

you make a delightful picture on that quaint settle, with the hound at your knee, and the armour above your head, and the hearth blazing beneath that splendid old chimney near."

He did not add what he thought, that the grace with which she sat half-reclined in the cross-legged oaken seat, and the sweet expression of her face lighted by the flickering flames, made the chief charm of the picture.

"Dr. Annesley," replied Alice, meeting his gaze of earnest and respectful admiration, "you are becoming a courtier. I do not recognize my honest old friend, Paul, with his blunt but wholesome rebuffs."

"It is I who am rebuffed now," he replied, singularly discomposed by the gravity of her manner.

"Nonsense, Paul," interrupted Mrs. Rickman. "Alice can only be pleased by such a pretty compliment. You ought to be of Gervase's profession."

"Yes; I always maintained that Annesley would make a first-rate lawyer," added Gervase.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Annesley, with a fervour that was almost religious.

Gervase laughed, and rose to settle a half-burnt log which threatened to fall when burnt asunder, thus ruining a fire landscape on which Alice had been dreamily gazing.

"How cruel you are—you have shattered the most romantic vision of crags and castles!" she said. "And you have destroyed the poetry of the hour, for I must light these candles."

"Were you seeing your future in the fire?" Paul asked, lighting the candles she brought forward, thrilling with delicate emotion when he touched her hand accidentally, and caught the play of the candle-light on her features.

Gervase watched them narrowly, though furtively, with a secret pity for Paul, for a vision less keen than his might detect a total absence of response on her part to the young doctor's unspoken feeling; and then he thought of his own future, which he read in the dull red glow of the fire, while the others kept up a desultory conversation in which their thoughts did not enter.

He had drifted, he scarcely knew how, into the office of Whewell and Son, solicitors. His mind in those early days had taken no bent sufficiently strong to make him resist his father's desire that he should follow law, since he declined the paternal profession of physic, a profession which Mr. Rickman, a London physician with a fair practice, had early left because he said he could not endure the whims of sick people, but really because, having a competency, he wished to pursue his favourite studies in the quiet of

Arden, where Sibyl was born when Gervase was about nine years old.

But once in the office, he found much to interest him, and after making progress from a desire to do his duty and please his parents, whose hopes all rested on their only son, ambition awoke in him, and he decided to make himself the head of the firm, and the firm the head of the profession in the county. This, at eight-and-twenty, he had accomplished. Whewell and Son was now Whewell and Rickman. The younger Whewell had renounced a profession that wearied him, and the elder was at an age when love of ease is stronger than love of power, and it was well known that the junior partner was the soul of the business, which daily increased.

As far as a country solicitor could rise, Gervase Rickman intended to rise, and then he intended to enter Parliament, where he felt his powers would have an opportunity of developing. This purpose he had as yet confided to no one, though he was daily feeling his way and laying the foundations of local popularity. A man who makes himself once heard in the House of Commons has, he knew, providing he possesses the genius of a ruler of men, a destiny more brilliant than that of any sovereign in the civilized world, and Gervase, looking at the burning brands and listening to the harmonious blending of Paul's deep voice with Alice's pure treble, saw such magnificent prospects as the others did not dream him capable of entertaining. And through all those princely visions Alice moved with an imperial grace.

"But what has become of your cousin all this time?" Alice was asking the doctor.

"Over the downs and in Medington by this time. We don't dine till half-past seven, so my mother will have a good hour to purr over the fellow and make much of him. Ned always was a lucky fellow, if you remember, Mrs. Rickman. He had the knack of making friends."

"He was a winning and well-behaved boy, I remember," she replied. "How fond Sibyl was of him!"

"It is just the same now, or rather it was at school. Whatever Ned did, people liked him. If he neglected his lessons, he always got off in class by means of lucky shots. Other fellows' shots failed. Born under a happy star."

"Yet he must inherit the curse of Gledesworth," Alice said.

"Oh! that is at an end. Reginald Annesley, being in a lunatic asylum, fulfils the conditions of the distich,

> "Whanne ye lorde ys mewed in stonen celle,
> Gledesworth thanne shalle brake hys spelle."

"Facts seem against the theory," Gervase said, "since the estate cannot now pass from Reginald Annesley to his son. By the way, have you not heard, Paul? Young Reginald is dead, killed while elephant-hunting in South Africa."

"Captain Annesley? Reginald? Dead?" cried Paul, with excitement. "We heard he was in Africa, and his wife and baby came home. Are you sure? Is it not some repetition of poor Julian's story?"

"It is perfectly true," replied Gervase, who was agent to the Gledesworth estate; "the news arrived yesterday."

Paul Annesley's father was first cousin to the Annesley who owned the estate, and who was only slightly acquainted with him. Paul did not even know any of those Annesleys, and the mad Annesley having had three sons, one of whom was married, and all of whom had grown to manhood, the prospect of inheriting the family estates had never entered his wildest dreams. But now only two lives stood between him and that rich inheritance; the life of an elderly maniac and that of an infant. No one knew better than he how large a percentage of male infants die.

"It is terribly sad," he said. "Oh! it does seem as if the curse was a reality, and worked still."

"I never believed in the curse," said Mrs. Rickman; "and I disbelieve it still. People die when the Almighty sees fit, it is not for us to ask why."

But Alice was a firm believer in the curse of Gledesworth, and defended its morality stoutly. Why, if blessings are attached to birth, should not pains and penalties cling to it as well? she asked. Was it worse to be a doomed Annesley than the offspring of a criminal or the inheritor of fatal disease, like the family at the "Traveller's Rest?"

"I think I would rather be an Annesley," she added, turning to Paul with a smile that seemed to reach the darkest recesses of his heart, and kindle a glow of vital warmth within him.

Then they fell to discussing the Gledesworth legend. In the days of King John a lord of Gledesworth died, leaving one young son, and the dead lord's brother, not content with seizing the lands, drove the widow and orphan from his door. One day in the hard winter weather, the widow appeared in want at the usurper's gates and begged bread for the starving child. And because she was importunate, the wicked baron set his hounds upon them and they killed the heir. Then the widow cursed the cruel baron, fled into the forest and was seen no more. But from that hour Gledesworth lands never descended to the eldest son; so surely as a man owned Gledesworth, sorrow of some kind befell him;

the land was a curse to its owner, as was the Nibelungen Hoard to whomsoever possessed it.

The morally weak point in the curse, as Gervase often observed, when beguiled to discuss the tragic stories of that fatal line, was that there appeared to be no chance of expiating the wicked baron's misdeeds, while the number of innocent victims who suffered from the curse was appalling.

"You are a hardened sceptic," Paul said. "Besides, you forget the 'stonen celle.'"

"Worse still. Because no owner of Gledesworth likes to exchange it for a stone cell, are all his descendants to be doomed?"

"You cannot measure a retribution which for good and for ill extends into the infinite, by the events of a rudimentary and finite world," Alice said.

"Quite so," replied Paul; "I confess to a great affection for the family curse. It keeps the idea of God before men's minds, though only a God of retribution," an observation which cheered Mrs. Rickman's kind heart, troubled as it was by sad rumours of Annesley's scepticism, and led on to a discussion in which they all lost themselves in the old interminable puzzles of the origin of Evil, the limits of Fate and the bounds of Will, till the hall clock gave musical warning of the hour, and Paul took hasty leave, finding himself belated.

When he was gone, Alice drew a chair to her adopted mother's side and began to tell her what she had done all the afternoon, and was duly scolded for various lapses of memory. She had lived in that house from her thirteenth year, being an orphan placed there by her guardians, that she and Sibyl might benefit from each other's society, and they had studied and grown up together so happily, that Alice hoped, on becoming the mistress of her own little fortune a year hence, to remain with them.

"Stay a minute, Alice," Gervase said, when a few minutes later she was about to follow Mrs. Rickman upstairs. "If you are not tired, I should like you to let me rehearse my speech for the Liberal meeting next week."

Alice willingly acquiesced, but asked if it would not be better to wait for Sibyl's return.

He laughed, and said that Sibyl had already been treated to two rehearsals; so Alice took up her station in the corner of the hall furthest from the staircase, which Gervase ascended till he reached the landing, behind the balustrade of which he stood beneath a lamp and looked down into the wide echoing hall, the dark panelling of which was but faintly lighted by a swinging lamp in its centre, and by the fitful fire-glow. Alice was scarcely

seen; but not a gesture or look of Gervase could escape her; and she was surprised when, taking a roll of notes from his pocket, his form dilated, his eyes kindled as they took a commanding glance of the wide space before him, and he sent his voice, which in conversation was harsh, echoing through the hall with a power which she had never suspected, and invested the political common-places which he uttered with a certain dignity. The cat sprang up in alarm; Hubert rose and sat listening at his mistress's feet with a critical air; Alice cried "Hear, hear!" and "No, no!" at intervals, for a good half-hour. Then the door opened, and Sibyl returned from her choir practice and made an addition to the audience.

"And did you ever hear such rubbish in your life, Sibyl?" Alice asked, laughing.

"No," she replied, "I was never at a political meeting before."

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS.

EDWARD ANNESLEY, finding no trace of his cousin at Arden Cross, took the path indicated to him over the next link in the chain of downs, dismissing Gervase Rickman from his mind with a dim momentary remembrance of having seen and disliked him before.

Thus every day we pass men and women whose hearts leap and ache like our own, taking no more count of them than of the stones along our path, though any one of these may turn the current of our destiny and alter our very nature.

The setting sun was now breaking through the splendour of the shifting clouds and lighting up, like a suddenly roused memory, the once-familiar but half-forgotten landscape, with its limits of hill and sea, its lake-like sheet of slate roofs down in the hollow where the confluence of two slow streams formed the River Mede. The lake of blue roofs, brooded over by a dim cloud of misty smoke, out of which rose the tall white church tower, its western face touched by the sun's fleeting glow, was Medington, the town in which he had passed many a school-boy's holiday.

All was now familiar: the furze in which he and Paul once killed snakes and looked for rabbit-holes; the copses where they gathered nuts and blackberries; and the hamlet with the stone bridge over its mirror-like stream, widening into a pond at the foot of the hill, which fell there in an abrupt steep, down which the cousins had made many a rapid descent, tobogganing in primitive fashion. There stood the mill with its undershot wheel; the plaintive cry of the moor-hen issued from the dry sedge rustling in the March wind; all sorts of long-forgotten objects appeared and claimed old acquaintance with him. The chimes of the church clock came floating through the dim grey air like a friendly voice from far-off boyhood, and after a little musical melancholy prelude, struck six deep notes.

He took the old field-path, thinking of things and people forgotten for years, and reflected that the two boys who played in those fields and who afterwards passed a year or two at a French school

together, were now men, partly estranged by the exigencies of life, until he found himself in the clean, wind-swept streets of the town, where the lamps were every moment showing tiny points o yellow fire in the dusk, and the shop-windows were casting pale and scant radiance upon the almost deserted pavement; for ever in the High Street there were few passengers at this hour, and little was heard save the cries of children at play, and the occa sional rumble of a cart and still more occasional roll of a carriage No one knows what becomes of the inhabitants of small country towns when they are not going to church or to market; the houses stand along the streets, but rarely give any sign of life; the shops offer their merchandise apparently in vain.

He stopped before a large red-brick house, draped with graceful hangings of Virginia creeper, now a mass of bare brown branches rattling drily in the wind; a house which withdrew itself, as if in aristocratic exclusiveness, some yards back from the line of houses rising flush with the street, and was fenced from intruders by a high iron railing, behind which a few evergreens grew, half-stifled by the thick coating of dust upon their shining leaves. There were three doors, one on each side, and one approached by a flight of steps in the middle; on one of the side doors the word "Surgery," was painted, and upon the railings was a brass plate, with "Paul Annesley, Surgeon, &c.," engraved upon it.

He was admitted by the central door into a large hall occupying the whole depth of the house, and having a glass garden-door on its opposite side. He had scarcely set foot within it when a door on his right opened, and from its comparative darkness there issued into the radiance of the lamp-lit hall a tall and stately woman, with snow-white hair, and large bright, blue eyes. Save her snowy hair, she showed no sign of age; her step was elastic, her figure erect as a dart.

"How do you do, Aunt Eleanor?" said Edward, going up to her and kissing the still blooming cheeks offered for his salute. "I missed Paul, as you see. How well you are looking!"

Mrs. Annesley held his hands and looked into his face with a seraphic smile, while she replied to his salutations, and said, with formal cordiality—

"Welcome, dear nephew, welcome to our dwelling. Paul should have been here to receive you, but his medical duties have doubtless detained him. You know what martyrs to duty medical men are. You may remember your dear uncle's life with its constant interruptions."

"Yes, I remember," returned Edward, not dreaming that his

cousin's medical duties at that moment consisted in drinking tea in the firelight and talking to a most attractive young woman. "I suppose you never know when to expect Paul."

"Never," she said, taking Edward's arm and walking with a slow step and rustling dress into the drawing-room, which was darkened by heavy curtains in the windows, and was only lighted by the fitful gleam of the fire. "Indeed, my life would be very sad and solitary but for the happiness it gives me to think that my dearest child is of so much use to his fellow-creatures. That, dear Edward, is my greatest consolation." Mrs. Annesley sank with the air of a saintly empress or imperial saint upon her throne-like arm-chair by the fire, and sighed softly and smiled sweetly as she arranged the white-satin strings of her delicate cap, which bore but a traditional resemblance to the widow's cap she had long since discarded as unbecoming.

Having dutifully placed a footstool for her, he took his seat on the opposite side of the fire, and began losing himself in admiration and wonder of his seraphic and dignified aunt just as he had done in his boyhood, indeed something of his boyhood's awe returned to him in the fascination of her presence.

She still sat as upright as in those days; neither arm-chair nor footstool were needed, save as adjuncts to her dignity. Every little detail of her dress showed the accuracy and finish that only women conscious of a power to charm bestow on such trifles: there was old rich lace in her cap and about her neck; a few costly jewels, old friends of Edward's, were in her dress, a ring was on her hand, the diamonds in which caught the firelight and broke it into a thousand tiny fierce flames; when she smiled, her well-formed lips showed a row of perfect pearls. She was an imposing, as well as a handsome figure.

Her nephew gazed earnestly at her for some time, while she went on in her smooth and gentle tones, asking after his mother and sisters, and telling him various little items of family news; while the firelight played upon the soft richness of her dress, drew sparkles from her eyes and her jewels, and threw her shadow, as if in impish mockery, distorted into the changing shapes of old witch-like women, upon the wall behind her.

"Well, Aunt," he said at last, "I need not ask if you are well. You don't look a day older than you used to. I have done nothing but admire you for the last ten minutes."

"So, sir," she returned, smiling, "you have already learnt the arts of your profession, and know how to flatter. Fie on you, to practise on your old aunt! And pray, how many young ladies have you bereaved of their hearts in this manner?"

"None," he replied, laughing. "I am not a lady-killer. I am put down as a slow fellow."

"Nay, my dear kinsman; I cannot believe that the ladies of these days have such bad taste. You have grown into such a tall fellow, you remind me of my sainted husband."

"My mother thinks me like my Uncle Walter," he replied, wondering by what process his lamented uncle had been canonized after death, since during his life his injured wife accounted him the greatest of sinners; "an ugly likeness, she tells me with cruel candour. Here comes a carriage. Is it Paul's?" he added, going to the window and looking into the dimly-lighted street. "What a capital cob!"

The Admiral, as the cob was called, brought his rapid trot to a sudden end. Paul sprang up the steps with a rapidity which in some men would have been undignified, but in him only gave assurance of boundless vitality, and came in bringing a breath of the fresh night air and a suggestion of healthy manhood and out-of-door life with him.

The cousins met with less of the savage indifference which Englishmen usually think fit to assume to welcome their best friends; they shook hands more than once, and smiled. Paul even said that he was delighted to see his dear Ted, that it felt like old times to see his honest face, and that he hoped he would be able to extend the brief visit he purposed making; while Edward avowed that it did him good to see his dear old Paul, and that he was glad to find the old fellow looking so jolly. Then they shook hands again, and the firelight danced upon Paul's irregular features and dark fiery blue eyes, and brought into unusual prominence a white scar beneath his left eye.

Edward remembered how Paul got that scar, and felt cold chills running over him.

After one more mighty grasp of his cousin's hand, Paul turned to his mother, who presented each cheek to him as she had done to Edward, and solemnly blessed him, as if he had been absent for months, or was at least a Spartan son returning with his shield rather than upon it. Then Paul enquired with an air of deep solicitude about various evil symptoms with which she appeared to have been afflicted in the morning, and was informed that all had happily yielded to treatment, save one.

"I still have that dreadful feeling of constriction across my eyes," she said, in a tone of mournful resignation.

"Have you, indeed?" returned Paul, earnestly. "Perhaps a little wine and your dinner may remove it. If not, I will give

you a draught. I will take Ned at once to his room, and then we can dine without delay."

Edward's surprise at finding his comely aunt the victim of so many dreadful pains was forgotten in the lively chat of the dinner-table, as well as in the great satisfaction that meal afforded him after his long walk.

"Your renown has already preceded you, Edward," Paul observed. "Arden is already full of your arrival."

"Arden? Why I saw no soul there!"

"No? Have you forgotten the sign-post?"

"What! was that squint-eyed fellow an acquaintance of yours?" he asked.

"What do you think of that, mother, as a description of Gervase Rickman?" said Paul.

"You don't mean to say that was Gervase Rickman?" exclaimed Edward. "I thought I had some faint remembrance of him. Heaven only knows what I said about his father! If he recognized me, why on earth couldn't he say so?"

"He was not sure till he described you to me. By the way, mother, I forgot to say why I was late. I met Rickman, and had to turn in at Arden."

It is thus that Love demoralizes; nothing else would have made Paul Annesley invent lies, especially useless ones. His mother looked amused at his demure face, then she glanced at Edward and laughed.

"And how *was* dear Sibyl?" she asked with satirical gravity.

"Sibyl? oh! I believe she was very well. She was out. You remember little Sibbie, Ned?" Paul said, tranquilly.

"A little mischievous imp who was always teasing us? Oh! yes, I daresay I should scarcely recognize her now. Is she grown into a beauty?"

"Are not all ladies beautiful?" returned Paul. "You shall go over and judge for yourself before long."

"I heard a sad piece of news at Arden," he continued; "Captain Annesley is dead."

"Who was he?" asked Edward, indifferently. "There is an Annesley in the 100th Hussars; I never met him."

Mrs. Annesley flushed deeply and said nothing for a few moments. Paul looked at her, and the unspoken thought flashed from one to the other, "this brings us very near the Gledesworth inheritance."

"How very sad!" she said at last, in rather a hard voice, while Paul bit his lips and then drank some wine, half ashamed at the interpretation of the swift glance.

"It is important that you should know who Captain Annesley was, Edward," he said after a minute, "because after me, you are the next heir to the infant son he leaves."

"This is ghastly; the idea of my being your heir!" replied Edward, who was speedily enlightened as to the exact relationship, and properly refreshed on the subject of the half-forgotten legend, in which he apparently took but a languid interest, and the conversation presently drifted to other topics.

After dinner Mrs. Annesley played some sonatas, and Edward sang some songs to her accompaniment till Paul, who had been up the night before, and in the open air all day, sank into a sweet slumber. The other two sat chatting in low tones, Edward describing his life as an artillery officer in a seaport town not far off, discussing his chances of promotion and his next brother's progress at Woolwich, and hearing of Paul's position, which was not a happy one. Dr. Walter Annesley's partner, who had carried on the business since his death, unluckily died soon after Paul began to practise with him, thus leaving Paul to make his way single-handed. Patients distrusted his youth and went to older men, so that things were not going as smoothly as could be wished, and the practice scarcely paid Paul's personal expenses. So they chatted till the servants appeared, and Mrs. Annesley read prayers, first asking Paul if he felt equal to performing the task himself after his labours, which he did not.

"Come along and smoke," said Paul with alacrity, when his mother had bidden them good-night. "I smoke in the consulting-room."

"Why there?" asked Edward, doubtfully.

"Well! you see it is the only place. I dare not smoke anywhere else. I tell the patients it insures them against infection, and receive the old ladies in the dining-room. I was nervous about her reception of you. But, I see you are in high favour."

"She seems perfectly angelic," replied Edward, selecting a cigar from the box offered him. "By the way, I had no idea she was in delicate health."

Paul laughed. "I doubt if any woman in the three kingdoms enjoys such brilliant health as my dear mother," he replied, "but she is never happy without some fancied ailment. I give her a little coloured water and a few bread-pills from time to time."

He did not add that Mrs. Annesley's ailments were in an inverse ratio to her amiability and formed a good domestic barometer.

Just then there was a tap at the door, and a soft voice said, "May I come in?"

"Certainly," replied Paul in some trepidation, and his mother entered.

"I will not intrude, dear children," she said; "I merely come to tell Edward on no account to rise for our early breakfast unless he feels quite rested, and to bring him this little gift of my working." She vanished with a "God bless you, dear boys," before her nephew had time to thank her, after which both young men breathed more freely, and Edward took an embroidered tobacco-pouch from his parcel.

"Poke the fire, Ned," Paul said cheerfully, when the door closed after her. Then he opened a closet where stood a skeleton partially draped in a dressing-gown, which the fleshless arm, extended as if in declamation, threw back from the ghastly figure, and crowned by a smoking-cap rakishly tipped on one side on its skull. "Let's be jolly for once, 'have a rouse before the morn.'" He transferred the dressing-gown from the bare bones to his own strong young shoulders, and the cap from the grinning skull to his dark-curled brow, beneath which the cruel scar showed. Perhaps it was Edward's fancy, excited by the suggestive revelation of the skeleton, which made the scar appear unusually distinct and livid; perhaps it was only the light.

"How kind of my aunt to make this," he said, looking at the pouch.

"She is kind," commented Paul, his temporary gaiety vanishing as quickly as it came; "no woman has a more heavenly disposition than my dear mother when free from those attacks, which are probably the result of some cerebral lesion."

"Perhaps," Edward suggested hopefully, "she may grow out of them with advancing years."

"Perhaps," sighed Paul. "But all the Mowbrays are the same, you know. It is in the blood. My uncle Ralph Mowbray was offended with my father once, and he laid awake at nights for six weeks concocting the most stinging phrases he could think of for a letter he wrote him. I'll show you that letter some day."

"Well! I hope it will never break out in you, Paul," said Edward, incautiously.

"I, my dear fellow?" replied Paul, with his good-tempered smile, "there is no fear for me. I am a pure-bred Annesley."

"Ah!" said Edward, looking reflectively at the fire.

"There has not been a serious explosion since New Year's Eve," continued Paul, clasping his hands above his head, and looking at the chimney-piece, which was adorned with a centre-piece of a skull and cross-bones, flanked by several stethoscopes and other mysterious and wicked-looking instruments, and above

which was the smiling portrait of a lovely little girl, with a strong likeness to Mrs. Annesley. "You know how I valued the Parian Psyche of Thorwaldsen's you gave me? She knew it, for she took it in both hands and dashed it on the hearth."

Edward again felt cold chills creeping over him, and his gaze followed Paul's to the dimpled child-face he had loved, Paul's only sister Nellie, whose end had been so tragic.

"And what did you do?" he asked.

"Oh! I just sent the Crown Derby tea-service after it," replied Paul, "so pray don't notice the absence of either."

"She valued the tea-service," said Edward, inwardly thankful that the fiery Mowbray blood did not flow in his veins.

"Imagine the smash," said Paul, pensively. "And the deed was scarcely done, when the door is opened, and in walks the vicar and stares aghast at the Lares and Penates shattered on the drawing-room hearth. My mother turns to him with the most heavenly smile and wishes him a Happy New Year. 'And just see what that clumsy boy of mine has done,' she adds quietly, pointing to the fragments. 'Quite a genius for upsetting things, dear child.'"

"'I thought I heard something fall,' replies the innocent vicar, quoting the line about 'mistress of herself though China fall,' and congratulating me on having a mother with such a sweet temper."

Edward mused for some time on the misery of his cousin's life, a misery rarely alluded to by Paul himself, and any allusion to which on Edward's part he would have deeply resented. He knew that the chain must be pressing heavily for him thus to disburden himself, and he suggested that he should marry and have a quiet home of his own; to which Paul replied mournfully, that he was not yet in a position to set up housekeeping.

"Though indeed——" he added, and suddenly stopped.

"Well?"

"It seems so brutal to build on a baby's death," he replied; "and yet——"

"It alters your position, Paul," said Edward, "and being sentimental about it won't keep the baby alive."

"True."

"I think I may assume that the 'unexpressive She' has already been found," Edward said, remembering the dark hints during dinner, and Paul smiled mysteriously.

"Perhaps I may meet her at Arden?" Edward added.

"Who knows? But I have never yet spoken. I am not entitled by my prospects to do so. I don't know if I have the

smallest chance. And when you see her, Ned," he added, with some hesitation, "perhaps you will remember——"

Edward burst out laughing and grasped his cousin's hand.

"Don't be afraid," he replied, "I am not a lady's man; and if I were, Aphrodite herself would not tempt me to spoil other people's little games."

"Remember your promise," said Paul solemnly, and they separated for the night, Edward wishing his cousin success, and thinking as he took his way upstairs that whatever Miss Sibyl Rickman's character might be, the Rickman blood was reputed to be an eminently mild and tranquil fluid, well calculated to temper the fire of such of the terrible Mowbray strain as might have been transmitted to Paul.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEET.

WHEN Paul Annesley appeared at breakfast next morning he had a heavy look, and yawned a good deal, for which he apologized, observing, casually, that he had been called up at two in the morning, and only got home at six.

Mrs. Annesley's comment upon this was a tranquil remark that it usually occurred three nights running; but Edward, whose deep slumbers had been invaded once or twice by sounds which roused him sufficiently to make him wonder if he had fallen asleep in the guard-house, questioned his cousin, and learned that he had ridden five miles on the cob he had used the day before, to a cottage in a dell, which could be approached only by a footpath; that he had tied the Admiral to a gate in a field, and left him while he visited the patient, who died.

In the meantime, the horse had broken loose, and, after a long and tantalizing chase round the field, Paul dropped and broke his lantern, wandered knee-deep into a pool of water, and slipped down once or twice; after which he decided to walk home through the dark, drizzling morning, leaving the provoking steed to his fate. This proved to be nothing more dreadful than being captured at daylight by the patient's husband, and led back to Medington, whither the widower was bound for various sad necessities. He now stood, with the animal before the door, even while the cousins were talking, a picture of homely tragedy.

In spite of these nocturnal adventures, Paul was bent on going to the meet, which was at the "Travellers' Rest" on Arden Down that day; he was further bent on Edward's accompanying him, though a search through the livery stables of Medington resulted in the production of nothing better than an immense gaunt old chestnut, which had once seen good days, requiring some moral courage to ride. Paul, with a truly heroic magnanimity, offered his cousin his own little thorough-bred, Diana, whom he loved like a child; but Edward, with scarcely less heroism declined, and the cousins started off on their dissimilar steeds.

As they trotted quietly along, Paul stopping occasionally to

visit a patient, Edward thought a good deal about him and his mother. What a good fellow he was, how cheerfully he faced the hardships of his lot, and, above all, what an excellent son he was to that very trying mother! Few sons were so much loved as he, and his affection for his mother was deep and strong. He must have been very desperate when he smashed the tea-service; it was the sole passionate outbreak on his part of which he had heard.

He thought of his own kind and sweet-tempered mother, also a widow, and to whom his conscience told him he was not as dutiful as Paul to his wayward parent, and wondered how it would have fared with himself, had his father married Eleanor Mowbray, as family tradition, confirmed by gentle Mrs. Edward Annesley's severe strictures on Mrs. Walter, reported that he had wished to do.

Over the chimney-piece in his bed-room at Medington was a portrait of Eleanor Mowbray which haunted him. It was taken at the time of her marriage, and represented a lovely girl in the childish costume of early Victorian days, with arch blue eyes peeping out from between two bunches of curls in front of the cheeks. He had gazed fascinated upon it, vainly trying to detect the lurking demon behind the angel semblance.

He was on a visit to Medington when Nellie's death occurred. The child, then twelve years old, on being severely and unduly scolded for some slight fault by her mother, who was chasing her from place to place, harassed at last beyond endurance, had turned, seized a brush from the hall table, and thrown it at Mrs. Annesley. Edward was standing by.

"Undutiful child! You have killed me! You are unfit to live. Never let me see you again!" the mother burst out with fierce vehemence.

The child took her at her word, and ran out of the garden door; Edward never would forget her white face as she turned before disappearing.

Next morning he saw her slight body borne drowned into that hall. She had not been missed; being in disgrace, she was supposed to be hiding about the house somewhere, until she was found by the river side, and thus tragically brought home.

Were there other demons lurking unseen behind other angel faces? he wondered. Did Eleanor Annesley in those innocent bridal days dream of what she was capable? did she even now realize the horror of the thing which at times possessed her? Paul, though he had "sent the tea-service after" the Psyche, did not dream that the curse of the Mowbrays had fallen on himself.

For not only is each human being an enigma to his fellows, a dark mystery fenced about on every side by impassable limits which obscure his nature almost as effectually as Sigfrid's Tarnkappe, or Cloak of Darkness, did the hero's bodily presence, but, what is still stranger, each is an insoluble mystery to himself. No one can tell how he will act in unforeseen circumstances, which may prove the touchstone to reveal unsuspected qualities; nay, even when the fierce discipline of life has brought many unexpected features to light, and a long record of good and ill is written on the memory, who can analyse the motives, mixed as they must be, which prompted those deeds?

Paul in the meantime was haunted by the vision of Alice, sitting in the carved oak seat beneath the armour, with the hound at her knee, in the fire-lit hall, and considering if he could manage to have himself landed at Arden Manor before the end of the day; for the days on which he did not see her became more and more flat and unprofitable.

> "Except I be by Sylvia in the night,
> There is no music in the nightingale;
> Unless I look on Sylvia in the day,
> There is no day for me to look upon."

Then he mused upon the news he heard there, and thought how it would have been with him, had Reginald's baby not been born. His prospects were so dark, he could not help thinking of Edward's happier circumstances, his more agreeable life and comparative wealth.

Now the chestnut pricked up his ears and looked about him with a joyous excitement, which rivalled Diana's own youthful ardour, and they knew that the hounds were near; Paul pressed on through the ever-growing stream of horses and carriages to see his patient, leaving his cousin to follow at leisure.

In spite of the leaden sky and thick moist air, which obscured all but near objects, the desolate spot on which the lonely inn was built looked gay and animated this morning. In front of the low stone wall of the courtyard moved the parti-coloured mass of hounds, their sterns waving with half-suppressed enthusiasm; out of their midst rose the huntsman on his bright bay, his scarlet coat emphasized by the grey background of the inn. That awful personage, the Master, splendidly mounted and brightly clad, with a world of care on his brow, was exchanging polite commonplaces with gentlemen, to some of whom his expressions later in the day would be less civil and more forcible. The mass of riders wore dark coats, but the proportion of red was enough to brighten the whole picture. Four or five farmers on good horses

of their own breeding, two or three beautifully equipped county gentlemen, a few ladies, some half-dozen nondescript riders, including a clergyman, who said he was only looking on, a rabble of boys, with half-a-dozen officers from regiments stationed near, made up the field. A barouche, two landaus, three waggonettes, a few phaetons, gigs and dogcarts, an empty coal-waggon and a butcher's cart, were drawn up in the road, and Edward vainly scanned the ladies in these vehicles in search of the object of Paul's affection.

Then he glanced at the solitary inn, and thought of the suffering that a thin wall separated from the animated group of pleasure-seekers. Reuben Gale was walking Diana up and down, and exchanging pleasantries with the Whip. His father was leaning on the low wall, with an empty pewter-pot in his hand, enjoying the scene just as if his daughter were not dying and he had not all those graves down in Arden churchyard. People were laughing, chatting and smoking; horses were champing their bits, and sidling and stamping with the exultation of the coming hunt. The warm, damp air was laden with the scent of opening buds, trampled turf and trodden earth; the luscious flute-notes of thrushes, and the tender coo-coo of wood-pigeons came from the copses below and mingled with the occasional neigh of a horse or whine of a hound. There was a joyous thrill of expectancy that made Edward forget his steed's shortcomings, and neither he nor any one else thought of the background of tragedy which shadowed every human being present.

Among the horses was a beautiful white Arab, easily distinguished by the characteristic spring of the tail from the haunches, and Edward observed the animal with such interest that he did not notice the rider. The latter, however, pressed his knees into the Arab, and sprang forward so suddenly that the excited Larry backed into an unpretending phaeton, containing an old gentleman and a young lady. He caught the flash of a pair of dark eyes, as he turned after getting free, and apologized, and then found himself accosted by the Arab's rider, a Highland officer of his acquaintance, who bestowed some ironical praise upon the unlucky Larry.

Edward laughed, and explained that it was Hobson's choice.

Captain McIlvray regretted that he had not known in time to offer him a mount. "But, my dear fellow," he added in his affected drawl, "you said you were staying at Medington."

"Yes, I am staying with some friends who live there."

"Really," returned the Highlander, "do you mean to say that anybody *lives* in that beastly hole?"

"Some few thousand people live there, I believe."

"Ah! you mean, Annesley, that they don't quite die there, eh?" he asked, not at once seeing the rebuke.

"I mean that they live pleasant and profitable lives there," he replied, wondering if Paul's life were either pleasant or profitable.

Captain McIlvray appeared to muse in some wonder upon this assertion, while a humorous twinkle in his eye showed that he was conscious of his own affectation and of Edward's irritation over it. But he did not yet see that he had been rude.

"And who are the virtuous people who live the supewior lives in the stweets of Medington?" he continued, determined not to be put down, and thus emphasizing the first discourtesy.

"Paul Annesley, my cousin, a doctor," Edward answered, in the neutral tones which best rebuke rudeness; "that brown mare with black points is his; he is visiting a patient in the inn there," he added, seeing that Captain McIlvray perceived at last that he had made a mistake. "He doesn't pretend to hunt, but says he can't help it if the hounds will run in front of him."

"Vewy good weasoning, vewy clever mare," the Highland officer said. "No idea you had friends there. Thought it was an inn." Then he asked to be introduced to the cousin, just as Paul came up on Diana, and Edward introduced them.

"And now, Edward," said Paul, after a few words, "I must re-introduce you to some old friends."

And, turning, he led him up to the very phaeton into which the chestnut had just backed, and the owner of the dark eyes, who had unavoidably heard every word that had passed between the two officers, proved to be no other than Sibyl Rickman.

"I should never have known you for our old friend, Sibbie," he said with unaffected admiration. Then the pack moved off to the copse below the inn, and the phaeton was drawn with the two horsemen into the moving stream which followed it, so that he had only time to observe a pretty voice and laugh, an animated face and an easily excited blush, as the charms which won Paul's heart.

But Sibyl, having overheard his conversation with the Highland officer, formed an estimate of his character which she never altered. She mused on it while talking at the cover-side to Paul, when Edward was renewing his acquaintance with Mr. Rickman. It seemed to the dreamy imaginative Sibyl that so fine a vision of young manhood had never before been revealed to her. His very gesture when he patted the neck of the despised old horse went to her heart, and remained there for ever.

The air was now alive with expectation; the eager cry of a

hound broke out and set the horses' ears quivering; the plaintive sound of the horn was heard; whips cracked like pistol-shots in the heart of the wood; the last cover hack was exchanged for a hunter, girths were tightened, bits examined, cigars thrown away and conversation became spasmodic. Again the passionate cry of a hound, another and another, then silence; more horn blowing, more pistol cracks, and demoniac yells from human lungs, finally the full triumphant chorus of the pack.

Then a strange jumble of sounds and excitement, a general stampede of saddle-horses, all kinds of misbehaviour on the part of those in harness, a universal madness seizing man and beast, and the cover-side in a few moments is deserted, riders streaming across the fields, and carriages along the nearest high-road, because a small reddish-brown animal with a bushy tail has just whisked cautiously out from the far side of the coppice, looking behind him with a sagacious grin, and rejoicing that the nearest muzzle sniffing his trail is a good way behind.

Straight along the valley beneath the down flashed Reynard, and what he thought of the splendid canine chorus behind him, and whether he appreciated the melody of the fine pack and was soothed to find them "matched in mouth like bells," unfortunately nobody knows. Yet one cannot help thinking that it must be a fine thing to dart away thus at full stretch, and by the exercise of all one's powers to strain and perhaps baffle all that tremendous following of instinct, strength and skill; to fight alone—one small, solitary animal—all those trained monsters in the chiming pack, those gigantic, high-mettled steeds, and that great army of thinking men. At all events this particular fox, rejoicing that his last meal had been opportunely timed to put him in trim for a run, laid his legs to the ground smartly, and gallantly resolved, if it came to the worst, to die hard.

On dashed the hounds, mad with exultation, uttering their wild music; on thundered the field, horses and men alike intoxicated with the chase, and neither thinking of Reynard's sensations. Now the Master's face is aflame with wrath and his denunciations are loud and pungent, as some reckless rider blunders over the hindmost hounds; the huntsman and the whip are alive in every nerve; the best riders are restraining the eagerness of their steeds; field after field is swallowed up, hedge and ditch and brook are cleared, with every field the hunt is drawn out into a longer and thinner stream; timid riders are seen scrambling along hedge-rows in search of gates and gaps; there lies a horse, hoofs uppermost, and near him his rider with red coat all tarnished, and once spotless breeches stained with mud. There

is a cry of "Ware wheat!" that cunning little brown beast has bolted straight across a field of young corn. On he dashes, less hindered by obstacles than any other member of the hunt, which perhaps makes him grin so sardonically as he flies.

The carriages see most of the fun from the high road; but now the hunt has vanished from their view, and spectators can only form shrewd guesses as to the whereabouts of the pack, and tyros are beginning to find that hunting is more complicated than it seems.

Paul and Diana have gone as straight as any bird; only once did they swerve aside, and that was to avoid over-riding Captain McIlvray, whom they observed sitting with an air of bewilderment in the middle of a field, whither his horse (who, after coming down on his nose, was now picking himself up and continuing his course riderless and undaunted) had pitched him while taking a stiff fence. Nothing but delight reigns now in Paul's breast: neither the shadow of the Mowbray temper nor the glory of Alice Lingard's presence in the fire-lit hall affects him, and when he sees another man flying out of his saddle he is half angry lest he should have contrived to break some bone and so need his aid. But the man knows how to fall, and is soon mounted again, followed by McIlvray, who has escaped with a few bruises, on his recaptured Arab.

As for Larry, he and his rider alike forgot his advanced age in the first burst of joyous excitement, and pounded over a field or two, taking a moderate fence, with the best. But at the second fence, a good strong bullfinch, horse and rider, dreadfully mixed up, came rolling down the opposite bank together, and Edward had to execute a vigorous roll of his own devising to get free of Larry's hoofs. The old horse appeared none the worse for his tumble, and the rider, finding that his own bones were intact, went on with moderate ardour, seeking gates and gaps in fences. What with these delays, and the necessity of going softly lest Larry should come down again, Edward was more than once thrown out, finding the trail again by dint of observation and surmise, and finally found himself a solitary rider on the slope of the down, with a spent horse, and the hounds nowhere. "Poor old fellow!" he said, patting Larry's hot wet neck, as he walked quietly along, "I doubt if any horse has done so gallantly as you to-day. You gave me the best you could, and now we will jog quietly home."

But the thing was to find a road; and they went through a couple of fields without seeing a living creature or discovering any means of reaching the high-road Edward knew to lie along the valley. The rain had cleared off, the breath of primroses and

violets came deliciously on the moist, mild, spring air, and the larks sang in distracting raptures and whirls of song.

The next field showed a pretty sight. It was fresh ploughed, and the scent of the warm earth rose from its symmetrical furrows, along which came, with rapid even strides, a man bearing on his left arm a wooden basket of peculiar shape into which he continually dipped his right hand, and, with an indescribably graceful movement, rhythmically matched to the motion of his steps, scattered a shower of seed-corn over the gaping furrows. It was delightful to watch this man, in his skilled strength and unconscious dignity, striding with swift even step and swift even sweep of the right arm up and down the ridge of lines, exactly throwing his golden rain with strenuous but regulated toil.

The sower paused and breathed while he refilled his basket from a sack standing upright in the field, and started off again, followed by a couple of horses and a man with a harrow to rake the seed into the soil. This man moved more leisurely, cracked his whip cheerily, and whistled a mellow note when not uttering strange sounds to his horses, and of him Edward asked the nearest way to Medington.

Having reached the end of the furrow, the man with the harrow caused his steeds to stop, and, taking off his cap and burying his fingers in his curls, looked with a perplexed air up and down and all round in profound silence for some moments. One might suppose that he was silently invoking the inspiration of some deity. Then he observed cautiously, "Darned if I knows."

"How am I to get down into the high-road then!" asked Edward.

"You med goo over down," continued the man, ignoring the second question, which had scarcely had time to penetrate to the remote regions of his brain, "but 'tis ter'ble hrough. Then agen, you med goo along down hroad."

"Exactly," replied Edward, no wiser than before; "but how am I to get into the road?"

"Zure enough," he returned, addressing the sower, "how be he to get into hroad?"

"Is there no lane?" asked Annesley, looking at the maze of fields between himself and the far-distant road in the valley.

"Ay," replied the sower, who was resting now, and bringing out his dinner from a bundle, "you'll zoon vind he. Goo on athirt them turmuts; there's a lane over thay-urr." And he pointed his thumb vaguely over his shoulder.

He rode athwart the turnips accordingly, not knowing that the sower considered "over there," with a westward direction of the

thumb, sufficient indication of the whereabouts of America, found a gate, and at last came upon a steep furzy slope the other side of the turnip-field. The ground gradually became rougher and steeper, and suddenly he found himself rapidly descending an almost perpendicular slope which the curve of the ground had hidden from him. He was just going to dismount, when he was relieved from that necessity by the sudden collapse of Larry, who stumbled over a rabbit-hole, and came crashing down head over heels, and rolled in a most complicated manner to the bottom; while Edward, on finding himself shot over Larry's head, instinctively guided his own rolls out of the horse's orbit, and, arriving at the bottom by a separate track, kept his bones unbroken.

The chestnut, less fortunate than his rider, was cut on his shoulder and knee, and presented a melancholy spectacle when he scrambled to his feet, and set about to console himself by browsing on the short turf near him; and Edward, reflecting that hunting on a worn-out hack has its drawbacks, began to wonder what was to be done next.

CHAPTER V.

SPRING FLOWERS.

HE found the high-road at last and a cottage, where he turned in and washed and bandaged Larry's knee. Then he set off on the road to Medington on foot, as fast as the woful limp of the unlucky chestnut would permit, with the bridle over his arm, and cheerily trolling out reminiscences of the Bay of Biscay. The road was long, the Bay of Biscay came to an end, and Larry heard with interest all about Tom Bowling, whose "soul is gone aloft."

Presently they reached a little village of thatched cottages in gardens, dotted on either side of the road, and there beneath the slope of the down Edward recognized the low square tower of Arden Church, with the manor house just beyond it, and burst out lustily with "'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay."

"For England, Home, and Beauty," repeated the singer in softer notes, wondering if the "Golden Horse," picturesquely shaded by a row of sycamore-trees, furnished good ale (for it was now quite hot and the sun was struggling through the clouds), when he saw a phaeton approaching the turning to the Manor, and recognized the dark flash of Sibyl Rickman's eyes.

The phaeton pulled up. Mr. Rickman condoled with him upon his melancholy plight, and bade him turn in to Arden at once; to which Edward at first demurred, averring that he was not presentable.

That difficulty was soon got over. Larry was comfortably stabled; it was agreed that his owner should send for him later. A little soap and water and a borrowed coat, made Edward quite presentable, and his host, surveying him with satisfaction, and observing that he had grown a good deal since he last saw him, conducted him along a panelled corridor to the drawing-room, a cheerful apartment in white painted wainscot, with an oriel window looking southward on a sunny old-fashioned garden, which was even now bright with early spring flowers.

The sun had at last burst through the clouds, and, as the drawing-room door opened, a flood of sunshine poured through

the oriel upon his face, half-blinding him for a moment. Then he saw Mrs. Rickman at work in an easy-chair by the fire, and near her Sibyl with a book, looking, now that she had put off her wraps, the pretty graceful creature she was.

Having spoken to Mrs. Rickman, he turned once more to the light, vaguely conscious of a disturbing presence in that direction, and there, rising from her seat beneath the glowing oriel window at a table on which she was arranging some flowers in vases, with the rich sunshine calling out all the gold tints in her brown hair, and making a tiny halo about her head, he saw Alice Lingard.

He stood still, and fixed a long earnest gaze upon her, not at first noticing Mrs. Rickman's introduction of "Miss Lingard, our adopted daughter," while a sudden light irradiated Alice's eyes and a warm glow suffused her face. In one hand she held some daffodils; as she rose, she overturned a basketful at her feet, and from the folds of her dress there glided primroses, violets and other spring flowers, of which the bowls and vases on the table before her were full.

> "O Proserpina,
> For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
> From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
> That die unmarried, ere they can behold
> The great sun in his strength."

They were all there, those delicate flowers of hope and spring for which Perdita longed, to give to her young prince; they made a fit setting for the young and gracious creature who rose from their midst, scattering them as she rose.

Her clear, tranquil gaze met the stranger's frankly for a moment, while a slight tremor made the slender daffodils quiver in her hand; but his long and silent glance in no way offended her, nor did it strike any one else as disrespectful. It was as if he had been gazing all his life at that sweet vision among sunshine and flowers; yet everything within him seemed to die and be born again as he gazed; life became glorious and full of dim delicious mystery in the sudden stir of intense feeling. He did not say, "This woman shall be mine," for he felt that she was his and he was hers for ever and ever.

Then he became aware that in rising she had over-turned the basket of flowers, and after the silent reverence which he made

on being introduced, his first action was to kneel before her and restore the scattered flowers to their places.

"It is a sudden leap from winter to spring, from the wet morning with the hounds to all these flowers and sunshine," he said, as he handed her a mass of blue violets.

"Yes, the spring always comes suddenly upon us, when it does come," Alice replied, grouping the violets.

"But, unluckily, it does not always stay," broke in Mr. Rickman, in his rough voice, which resembled the rasping of a chair drawn over a stone floor; "even the Italians, who know what spring really means, the spring northern poets dream about and never see, have a proverb to that effect; about the first swallow, Sibbie, my dear."

"Nobody wants our musty old proverbs, papa," replied Sibyl, with a graceful impertinence that always pleased her indulgent father, "Mr. Annesley would far rather have some dinner."

"Perhaps he would like some violets as a welcome back to Arden, Alice," suggested Mrs. Rickman. "Those grey Neapolitans are the sweetest. I can scarcely believe this is little Ned Annesley shot up so tall."

"There, Mr. Annesley," Alice said, handing him a bunch of the double violets, "I present you with the freedom of Arden. Miss Rickman should have done it as the real daughter of the house." She looked up with a frank smile, which made him feel as we do in dreams when we light upon some long-lost treasure and imagine that an end has now come to all care.

Mr. Rickman began to discourse, in his harsh yet kindly voice, upon the extensive use of flowers in the religious and civil life of the ancient Greeks, and Edward smiled to himself when he recalled Gervase's schemes in school-boy days to start his father on an absorbing monologue, and so divert his attention at critical moments. Mr. Rickman had not changed in the least; his small keen blue eye was just as bright, his face as dried-up and lined, his slight wiry figure had the same scholar's stoop, and his manner was as absent and dreamy as in those boyish days.

Soon they found themselves at table in the dark oak-panelled dining-room, but it seemed less dark than when Edward had last seen it; the pictures, with their fine mellow gloom, still hung dusky in the darkness; but some silver sconces and bits of old china brightened the walls; a vase holding daffodils made a lustre against a black panel and harmonized with a blue china bowl of the same flowers on the table. Yet not these trifles alone brightened the darkness of that familiar old room.

"Yes," replied Mr. Rickman, when Annesley said something

about the unaccustomed brightness the flowers wrought; "the feminine eye is ever seeking the ornamental. My daughters are occupied from morning till night in trying to beautify everything. Happily they do not seek to improve my appearance"—this was too evident—"and respect the sanctity of my study——"

"The dirt of his den," interrupted Sibyl.

"The whole of human history is permeated by this peculiarity of the female mind," continued Mr. Rickman, abstractedly gazing into space; "all legend is pervaded by it. I purpose one day to bring out a paper on the 'Influence of the Feminine Love of Ornament upon the Destinies of the Human Race.' My paper will embrace a very wide range of thought. I suppose there is no period of human history when the feminine desire to wear clothes did not manifest itself; the passion for improving upon the workmanship of nature by art is evinced to-day in the rudest savage tribes as well as in the highest circles of European fashion. A necklace has in all nations been the most elementary article of female attire; a woman paints her face and tattoos her body long before she arrives at the faintest rudiment of a petticoat. I need not remind my readers,—I mean you, my dears, and Annesley—of the part a necklace played in the tremendous drama of the French Revolution, and there are numerous episodes in that sanguinary tragedy——"

"But we can't dine on a sanguinary tragedy, papa," said Sibyl; for, having started himself upon a congenial topic, her father had laid down his knife and fork, and with folded hands was placidly contemplating the joint rapidly cooling before him.

"True, my dear, very true, I had forgotten the dinner," he replied, with his accustomed meekness, while hastening to carve the joint; "the female mind—but perhaps, Annesley, the female mind may not interest you. At all events you can read my notes upon the subject later, and you may be able to furnish me with the results of your own experience in that branch of study."

In spite of his pedantry, Mr. Rickman was in Annesley's dazzled eyes a charming and interesting old man, with his stores of out-of-the-way knowledge and his simplicity concerning the things of every-day life. Mrs. Rickman seemed the most loveable old lady, as she truly was, and Sibyl the wittiest and prettiest of sprightly maidens: the simple food before him might have been a banquet, the Arden home-brewed ale was a drink for gods. It is difficult for cold blood to realize the enchantment that fell upon him, the kind of enchantment that makes everything around one charming, oneself included.

He could not tear himself away. After dinner his host, finding

him so good a listener, took him to his study and showed him his treasures—coins, gems and antiquities; but when these were exhausted, he lingered still as if spell-bound, apparently listening to the notes of a piano sounding through the house. Some instinct told him that Alice's hand was evoking the solemn harmony.

She continued to play when he entered the drawing-room whither his host led him, looking up to ask if they "minded the music." He took a seat by Sibyl, his eyes following the slender fingers which drew the living music from the passive keys, and his mind full of unspeakable thoughts. Then she sang the beautiful song,—

"Tell me, my heart, why morning's prime
Looks like the fading eve,"—

which is like the long-drawn sigh of an excessive happiness, and he listened in ever-growing delight. Sibyl looked at him once during the music and a strange feeling came over her; his face was like that of a St. George she had seen pictured somewhere, so rapt and earnest.

Then, at Mrs. Rickman's request, Sibyl sang, to Alice's accompaniment, the following song:

"Once have I seen and shall love her for ever;
For the soul that glanced from her eyes to mine
Is lovely and sweet as its delicate shrine;
But once have I seen and must love her for ever,
All my heart to her resign;
Though never for me her eyes may shine,
Though never perchance may I divine
How 'tis when lives together twine,
Since once I have seen I must love her for ever.'

Still he lingered, though the afternoon, which grew more balmy and beautiful towards its close, was wearing away, and one of the girls opened the window wide to let in the sunny air, and he knew that he ought to go.

"And is Raysh Squire alive?" he asked, seeking some excuse for lingering. "I should like to see the old fellow again."

"You may hear him at the present moment, ringing your poor cousin's knell," said Sibyl, calling his attention to the tolling from the steeple near, which had not ceased since he approached the village, though it had been but faintly heard through the closed windows, and Mr. Rickman suggested that the ladies should take their guest to the belfry and reintroduce him, a proposition Edward eagerly seconded.

Even while they spoke, Raysh Squire came to the end of his monotonous and melancholy office in the chill belfry, and went out into the afternoon sunshine, stretching his stiffened arms and yawning. As he did so, he saw a figure in shirt-sleeves by a barrow on the other side of the churchyard wall in the vicarage grounds, stretching his arms and yawning with equal intensity, and since nothing fosters friendship like a community of interests and occupation, this sympathetic sight moved him to drag his slow steps across the mounded turf to that quarter, and, resting his arms on the wall, to look over it, just as the figure in shirt-sleeves, which was that of a young and stalwart man, executed a final yawn of surpassing excellence, and seating himself on the barrow, began to fill a short pipe.

"Warm," said the sexton, a long wiry, bony figure, with a fleshless face, black hair, and whiskers touched with grey.

"Warmish," replied the gardener, slowly, without raising his eyes from the turf on which he was gazing, while he kindled the pipe he held in the hollow of his hands.

Then the sexton, turning round towards his cottage, which stood at the churchyard gate, beckoned to his grandchild to bring him the mug she held in her hand, which contained his "four o'clock," a modest potation of small beer.

"Buryen' of mankind, Josh Baker," said the sexton, after applying himself to this refreshing cup, and thus concealing his features for some moments, "is a dryen traäde."

"Ay," returned the gardener, after slowly and solemnly surveying the sexton's withered features for some time, "you looks dried, Raysh Squire." Then he withdrew his gaze and puffed with long, slow puffs at his pipe, bending forwards, his arms resting on his legs, which were stretched out apart before him, and his hands clasped together.

"Buryen' of mankind," continued Raysh, after a thoughtful pause, during which he sought fresh inspiration from the "four o'clock," "is a ongrateful traäde. Vur why? Volk never thanks anybody fur putting of 'em underground."

Josh pushed his felt hat back on his yellow curls, and apparently made a strong effort to take in this strikingly new idea for a moment or two, after which he replied, "I never yeard o' nobody returning thanks vur the buryen', not as I knows on, I haint."

"No, Josh Baker, and I war'nt you never will, wuld boäns as you med make. A ongrateful traäde is buryen', a ongrateful traäde."

"I hreckon you've put a tidy lot underground, Master Squire," said the gardener, after a pause.

"Hreckon, I hev, Josh," returned the sexton, with a slow lateral extension of the lines in his withered face, resembling a smile. "Hreckon I've a putt more underground than you ever drawed out on't, aye, or ever wull. I've putt a power o' quality underground, let alone the common zart. Wuld passon, I buried he, and the Lard knows where I be to putt this here one, the ground's that vull. Eln Gale, she's a gwine up under tree there. I shown her the plaäce; 'And I'll do ee up comfortable, Eln,' I zays. 'Thankee kindly, Master Squire,' zes she; 'you allays stood my vriend,' she zays. 'Ay, and I allays ool, Eln,' zays I, 'and I'll do ee up proper and comfortable, and won't putt nobody long zide of ee this twenty year to come.' 'Thankee kindly, Master Squire,' she zes, ''tis pleasant and heartsome up under tree when the pimroses blows, and you allays stood my vriend.' There aint a many like Eln. A ongrateful traäde is buryen' and a dryin' traäde."

"You aint ben' burying of this yer Capen Annesley, Raysh," objected the gardener after some thought. "How be um to bury he, if so be as he's yet by a elephant?"

"Hreckon they'll hae to bury the elephant, Josh Baker, if so be they haes Christian buryen' in they outlandish plaäces o' the yearth. I've been a hringen of en' out vur dree martial hours, and I've a done what I could vor 'n, I caint do no more. I hringed 's grandfather out and 's brothers, hringed 'em out mezelf, and terble dry work 'twas. Ay, I've pretty nigh hringed em all out. Annesleys is come to their last end."

He illustrated this melancholy assertion by a final application to the "four o'clock," having brought which to its last end, he handed the mug to the little wide-eyed grandchild, who trotted off with it.

"This yere doctor o' ourn's a Annesley; there's he left," objected the gardener.

"There's Annesleys, and there's Annesleys, Josh Baker. Zame as wi apples, there's Ribstone Pippins and there's Codlings. They Medington Annesleys is a common zart," said the sexton, his voice conveying severe rebuke for the gardener's ignorance, mingled with compassion for his youth. "Ay, Josh Baker, this yere's a knowledgeable world, terble knowledgeable world 'tis to be zure."

The gardener was too much crushed by this combination of axiom and illustration to make any reply, beyond doubtfully hazarding the observation, "Codlings biles well," which was frowned down, so he continued to smoke steadily with his eyes fixed on three daisies before him, while the scent of his tobacco,

which was a doubtful odour, mingled with the scent of the mown grass in his barrow with most agreeable results.

The sexton meantime leant upon the mossed stone wall, enjoying the double pleasure of successful controversy within and the warmth of the March sunbeams without, and listened with vague delight to the rich flute-notes of a blackbird near, till the click of the churchyard-wicket made him turn his head in that direction and walk slowly thither, while the gardener still more slowly rose and wheeled his barrow with its fragrant burden to its destination.

"Afternoon," growled Raysh, pulling his hair slightly as he approached the ladies from the Manor, and looking at them as much as to say, "What do you want now?"

"You may as well look pleasant, if you can, Raysh," said Sibyl; "we have only brought you an old friend."

"You don't remember me, Master Squire, I daresay," said Annesley. "I was here as a boy with Mr. Gervase Rickman and my cousin, Paul Annesley."

"I minds ye well enough," replied Raysh. "Master Eddard you be, and a terble bad buoy you was to be zure. You and t'others, between ye, pretty nigh gallied me to death. Not as I bears no malice, bless ee. Buoys is made a purpose to tarment mankind, zame as malleyshags* and vlays, and buoys they'll be till kingdom come, I hreckon."

"I fear we did lead you a life of it. I seem to remember getting into the tower and ringing the bells at some unholy hour."

"D'ye mind how I whacked ye vor't?" replied the old man, brightening at the recollection. "You minds, Miss Sibyl; you zeen me laying the stick athirt the shoulders of en' and you zinged out to me to let en off, and I let en off. I'd gin en a pretty penneth avore you come," he added, with satisfaction.

"And I had forgotten this service, Miss Rickman," said Annesley, laughing. "Perhaps some day I may repay the debt, though not in kind. Can we get into the church, Raysh?"

"You med get into church if you'd got ar a kay," replied the old man; "but if you aint got ar a kay you'll hae to wait till I vetches one vor 'ee."

"He gets more arbitrary every day of his life," explained Sibyl laughing; "and we spoil him more and more."

Alice stopped at the churchyard gate to see the sexton's ailing wife, and this circumstance caused Annesley to hurry through the church with only half an interest in the tombs of his ancestors who were buried there, and the humours of his old friend

* Caterpillars.

Raysh, whose "chrisom" name was Horatio, he told him. He had rung out George the Third, his two sons, and rung in the latter and Queen Victoria, he informed them, evidently thinking that neither of those sovereigns could have quitted this mortal scene without his aid.

"Ryalty," he observed, "takes a power o' hringen, and well wuth it they be. I don't hold with these yer publicans, Mr. Annesley, as wants to do away wi' Queen Victoria. They med zo well let she alone, a lone lorn ooman what have rared nine children. Wants to make everythink so vlat as the back o' my hand, they publicans doos. Ah, you med take my word vor't, when you begins zetting down what the Lard have made high, you never knows where 't will end. They begin wi' clerks. Thirty-vour year I stood under passun, and eddicated the volk with Amens, and giv out the Psalms what was zung to dree viddles, a clarinet and a bugle, as you med mind when a buoy. And now they've a zet me down long wi the lay volk, as though I wasn't nar a bit better than they. Ay, that's how they began, zure enough, and the Lard only knows where they med end. We caint all on us be Queens, and we caint all on us be clerks, as stands to rayson. Zo those yer Radical chaps they ups and zes, 'we wun't hae no clerks, nor no Queens, nor no nothink,' zes they. Ay, that's how t'es, zure enough."

Annesley replied that, being himself a plain man, whose business it was to serve the Queen, he was no politician, and, having sealed this assertion by the pressure of a crown-piece into Raysh's fleshless palm, came out of the church, thus leaving a good impression upon the old sexton, who remained behind to tidy up the belfry before finally locking the doors.

CHAPTER VI.

THORNS.

It would have been better if Edward Annesley had resisted the spell which kept him chained to the spot that afternoon; but he did not. He lingered outside the sexton's cottage, waiting for Alice, and talking to Sibyl of the days when they were children.

"We were such extremely tiresome children," Sibyl said, "that I can't help hoping that we have a chance of growing into at least average Christians."

Then it was that some demon inspired him with the notion of forwarding Paul's suit by proxy, and he replied that one of them, namely Paul, had matured into something far beyond the human average, and that all he wanted to bring him to absolute perfection was a good wife. When he said this he looked straight into Sibyl's bright eyes, but without evoking the embarrassment he expected.

Then he blundered further into some observations upon the wisdom of marrying a friend known from childhood, and said finally that he thought such a friendship the best feeling to marry upon.

"Do you think so?" she returned wistfully, and with the self-forgetfulness which lent such a charm to all she said; "I can't help thinking that *I* should like a little love."

"A little," he echoed, looking with warm admiration at the bright face still so unconscious of itself; "oh! Miss Rickman, it is not a little, but a great deal of love that such a face as yours commands!"—He broke off, feeling that he had blundered seriously. Sibyl bent over a honey plant encrusted with pink-scented blossom, about which the bees from Raysh Squire's hives were humming—an old-fashioned cottage plant, the scent of which ever after stirred unspeakable feelings within her—for a moment, and then, quickly regaining her composure, replied "What rubbish we are talking! we want Gervase to put us down with one of his little cynical speeches."

"Has Gervase grown into a cynic?" he asked, wondering how great an ass he had made of himself, and greatly relieved when,

the long recital of Grandmother Squire's woes being at last ended, Alice came out from the honeysuckled porch.

"Grandmother Squire is in the loveliest frame of mind to-day, Sibyl," she said. "'Sure enough, Miss Lingard,' she told me, 'we be bound to putt up with Providence, hreumatics and all. Not but what I've a had mercies. There was the twins took off, and what we yarned in the chollery.'"

"Poor old soul!" commented Sibyl, as they turned away from the cottage, "her rheumatism does try her. She said only yesterday, 'Raysh is bad enough, and I've a put up with he this vour and vorty year. But Raysh aint nothing to rheumatics, bless un!'——Oh!" Sybil's gay voice suddenly changed to a shriek of terror—"He will be killed!" she cried, and flew down the lane to the high-road, preceded by Annesley, who leapt the gate she was obliged to open, while Alice ran to call Raysh.

At Sibyl's cry, and the grating sound of an overturned vehicle dragged over the gravel, the others turned their faces to the high-road, where they saw a half-shattered dog-cart, jolted along by a powerful iron-grey horse, which was kicking against the ruin at his heels and maddening himself afresh at every kick. At the horse's head, and holding him with a grasp of iron, was Gervase Rickman, hatless, and in imminent peril in his backward course, but making his weight tell fully against the plunging horse, whose progress he occasionally arrested altogether for a moment.

He had evidently been struggling for some time with the frightened animal; his face was pale with fatigue, and his hair damp with sweat. At some distance further up the road lay the unfortunate groom, who had been thrown out by the overturn of the vehicle, and who occasionally got up and tried to walk, and, then, throwing up his arms in agony, fell again, hurt in the leg; while Gervase struggled pluckily on, now and then calling for help. Some women came out into the cottage-gardens and shouted the first male name that occurred to them. Joshua Baker came pounding heavily over the vicarage lawn, with wide-spread arms and an action like that of a runaway cart-horse. Raysh issued from the churchyard with a lengthened but certainly not hurried stride, and arrived in time to bestow his benediction on the cutting of the last strap. Annesley reached the spot first, Sibyl and Josh were a good second, and in a few minutes the first-comers had cut away the wreck and set the frightened horse free, Gervase still clinging gallantly to the beast's head, in spite of his indignation with Sibyl, who tried to help the men, and certainly kept the wreck from falling upon instead of away from the horse, until the creature, released from the

clattering encumbrance at his heels, gradually quieted down, snorting and quivering less and less.

By that time the owner of the equipage came running up from a house beyond the village, where he had been visiting a patient, while the unlucky groom, having dozed off in the afternoon stillness, had been taken by surprise when some pigeons flew suddenly up under the horse's nose and started him off. Before the frightened lad could get the reins properly in hand, the headlong course was terminated by a cannon against the bank at the corner, and he was pitched out.

In a very few minutes the wreck was cleared from the road, the runaway led off, the injured lad taken into the "Golden Horse," and attended to by his master, for whom a four-wheel had been got ready, and the Manor party moved off slowly homewards.

Annesley forgot his prejudice against the "squint-eyed fellow" of the previous day; he could not have renewed his acquaintance with Rickman, whom he had last seen a lad in his teens, under better circumstances. His heart warmed towards the sturdy figure he had seen putting out all its strength against the great horse, with eyes glowing with courage and determination and every nerve instinct with vigour and gallantry.

"Well, Annesley," Gervase said, with a careless laugh, when they had reached the house, "perhaps you ought to know that you have been playing the Good Samaritan to Paul's most deadly foe. You may have heard of some of the misdoings of Davis. No? Then you will before long."

"I thought I knew the man," Annesley replied. "What! not the son of old Dr. Davis, he looks too old? Why does Paul dislike him? He seemed a good fellow."

"That old look is the head and front of his offending. He gets all Paul's patients by it. It is hard upon Annesley, who has twice his brains and education. He studied at Paris, as you know, after walking the London hospitals, while Davis scrambled through his course as best he could, and took a second-rate Scotch degree. Yet Davis succeeds; he so thoroughly looks the family doctor, and was an aged man in his teens. Paul is rich in legends of the atrocities committed by Davis through ignorance and stupidity."

Annesley replied that Paul's youthful looks did not seem a sufficient set-off against skill and science; but Rickman explained that other things were against Paul. "You may have noticed," he added, "that he has an unlucky habit of speaking the truth; he has never mastered the truism that language is given us to conceal our thoughts."

Edward had observed his cousin's bad habit, but did not see how it could affect his success.

"My dear Annesley," returned Rickman, "have you not yet observed men and discovered the fatuity of the truth-speaker? Animals have no language because they have nothing to conceal; they can communicate facts to each other without speech. But men, that is civilized men, only exist by means of concealments; if the savage virtue of truth prevailed, society would revert to chaos. Now, for instance, Paul is called to a man who is killing himself by drinking spirits; the patient complains of his miseries, and asks what is the matter with him. 'Gin is the matter with you,' replies Paul, 'and if you don't leave it off you will be a dead man before long.' Whereupon Paul is sent off, and Davis called in. Davis looks grave and sympathetic; he talks about complications and obscure symptoms, and gives the complaint a Greek name a yard long. 'In the meantime,' he says, 'alcoholic stimulants, even in the most moderate degree, may prove fatal.' Davis has studied the use of speech, Annesley has not."

"I like Paul's way best," Sibyl observed.

"You are a young savage," replied her brother.

"Still, I do not see why Paul should be at odds with Davis," persisted Edward.

"Well! you *are* a refreshing young party!" thought Gervase. "Annesley is jealous," he added aloud—"all the Mowbrays are. I should like you to observe casually, when you get home, that you met a delightful fellow named Davis, and helped pick up his fragments. You will then hear something not to the doctor's advantage."

"Language is used by some people to conceal their thoughts," commented Annesley. "I suppose, Mrs. Rickman, that you take that grain of salt with your son's statements."

"Always when he indulges his cynical vein," she replied. "But seriously, Mr. Annesley, the name of Davis acts on your cousin—yes, and on Mrs. Annesley—like a red rag on a bull, and people who are intimate with the Annesleys don't visit the Davis set, and the Davis set don't mix with the Annesley set. The medical profession is a jealous one."

"Raysh Squire," Edward replied, "says that jealousy dislodged him from the reading desk. Raysh is as great a politician as ever—doesn't look a day older than he did years ago."

"The old rascal wears well," Gervase added. "He says it is brain that keeps him sweet. Nobody can 'get upsides with' him. Raysh is the only man I ever heard talk sense upon politics."

"Why, Gervase, he is a rank Tory," cried Sibyl, "and you are a Liberal! How can you agree with him?"

"Innocent child! Who said that I agreed with him? I only said he talked sense in politics, which I take care never to do, because people would never listen to me if I did."

"Really, Gervase," said Alice, "I cannot understand your politics. With us you always talk like a Conservative, and yet whenever you write or speak in public you express the most extreme Liberal opinions."

"Party government," replied Gervase slowly, "is a useful machine, but it has its drawbacks. One is, that it obliges men to adopt a certain formula of clap-trap and stick to it."

"Just so," said Annesley, rising to take his leave. "If you want to keep your hands clean, you must leave politics alone."

"I don't believe it," cried Alice warmly. "I cannot believe that honour and honesty are not necessary in the government of a great nation. Men are so weak before evil, so ready to bow down before the mean and base. If they had but the courage to stand up before Wrong and say, 'We will not bow down to it, we do not believe in this god; Right is stronger than Wrong,' what a different world it would be!"

"It would indeed," replied the young men simultaneously, but each with different meaning, and Gervase explained that he was not speaking of ideal politics but of party government—a very different matter. Then Edward took his way homeward, musing upon the sudden fire in Alice, and stirred by her words, though he seemed to listen to Gervase, who walked part of the way with him.

Paul Annesley did not appear until dinner was served; he had been in at the finish of the best run of the season, and on his return had to make another journey. He was fagged and half-stupid, in poor condition to entertain the small dinner-party before him, which was to be augmented later on by a contingent of young people to tea.

"For Heaven's sake, Ned," he managed to whisper to his cousin, "entertain all these solemnities for me! I am dead-beat, and as stupid as an owl." An order that Edward received and carried out literally.

For a full hour after dinner the wearied doctor could do nothing but yawn, until in desperation he went out of the room and got himself some strong coffee, while his cousin took his place.

Medington parties were not very brilliant, as a rule; the same set of people transplanted from house to house, and going through

exactly the same rites and ceremonies at each, produced rather a monotonous effect upon one another; a stranger, and especially a stranger of the sex which is so sadly in the minority in country towns, was a welcome addition to these meetings.

Paul was called out again just after his dose of coffee, and when he returned and entered the room unnoticed, to find people amusing themselves to an unusual degree, himself a nonentity in his own house, and his cousin quite at home in his place, a queer feeling came over him. He sat silent and gloomy in a remote corner, mentally recalling all Edward's past misdeeds, and disparagingly criticizing his present demeanour.

His old offences of being taller, stronger, in better circumstances, and in a profession that he had himself most regretfully renounced from a sense of duty, revived, though perhaps Paul was not aware of it. All he consciously thought was that Edward was not the good fellow he had been; his manner was not quite up to the mark; there was a certain coxcombry about him that he really was sorry to observe, and so on.

During these gloomy reflections, his cousin observed to him in passing his chair, just as some one was about to play on the piano, "How well Miss Rickman sings!"

"How on earth do *you* know how she sings?" growled Paul.

"I spent the afternoon at Arden," was the disquieting reply, which set Paul pondering as to how he got there, and, above all, why he went.

Then he heard his mother request his cousin to do some little service that should have fallen to himself, and again began mentally depreciating him, until he looked up by chance and caught the reflection of his haggard, scowling face in a mirror, and started with a shamed sense of his own paltriness which made him gloomier than ever.

"I cannot imagine what I should have done without you to-night, Edward," Mrs. Annesley said when the people were gone, "Paul was utterly fagged and stupid. Another time it would be better for you to leave the room altogether, Paul."

"Fine young man, that cousin of yours," said an elderly gentleman whom Paul was helping into his coat in the hall; "glad to see him, whenever he likes to look in." Was it possible that these trumpery things could add to the acerbity of Paul's feelings? He would have scouted the idea.

Overcome with sleep as he was, he would not go to bed until he had had a few words with his cousin, whom he took to his room to smoke.

"I think," he began, after a few fierce puffs at his pipe, "t at

you might have waited for me before calling on the Rickmans. As I told you, I had arranged my work on purpose to have a spare morning to-morrow, and meant to drive you over to luncheon."

He was only half mollified when Edward recounted his misadventures with the chestnut, and his accidental meeting with the Rickmans at their door.

"You military fellows never suffer from want of assurance," he grumbled; "you seem to have made yourself pretty well at home at the Manor."

"It was not due to personal merit; I was received as your cousin," he replied. "I say, Paul, I congratulate you on your choice. I am glad you forewarned me; such a charming girl, and so clever as well as pretty!"

Paul's eyes flashed; he could scarcely bear even to hear her admired by another, and the word "pretty" seemed so inadequate to express the lofty charm that made a sort of paradise about Alice.

"And do you suppose," he replied in his haughtiest manner, "that my choice would be less than the very highest? No mere prettiness would attract me. I may never win her, I may never even have the right to speak to her. But I shall never decline upon a meaner choice."

"Oh! you will win her, never fear," replied Edward, on whom this arrogant tone jarred. "But why not drive over all the same to-morrow? It would only be civil to thank Mr. Rickman for stabling the unlucky chestnut."

"It would be more military than civil," returned Paul with asperity. "If you begin an acquaintance by coming two days following to lunch, how on earth you are to carry it on, Heaven only knows!"

It must have been the iced pudding, Edward thought; something has disagreed with him.

"You did not tell me," he added aloud, after long and silent reflection on the face he had seen in the sunny oriel among the flowers that morning, "how Miss Lingard came to form one of the Arden family. Has she been with them long?"

"When Sibyl was about thirteen they advertised for a girl of the same age to educate with her. Then Miss Lingard's guardians placed her there. She has no ties of her own, and having become attached to them, and they to her, she now considers Arden her settled home."

"They all appear fond of her, even Gervase," returned Edward. "She treats him quite as a brother——"

"Did that strike you?" interrupted Paul.

"Oh! yes, she scolded him just as my sisters do me. And she picked up his hat and dusted it in the most matter-of-fact way, and he took it without a word of thanks. How pluckily he stood up to the kicking horse! I like Rickman. I like them all," he added warmly. "Such genial people, so clever, and yet so homely in their ways. I like homely ways. I like the dear old house. It seemed all sunshine and music and flowers!"

Paul's dark face flushed, and his eyes flashed so that the whites were visible.

"Now I know," he thought, "where he got those confounded violets."

For, going to seek his cousin in his room just before dinner, the scent of flowers attracted him, and he saw a bunch of double grey violets in water on a table. He knew his habits well, and buying flowers was not among them; so he laughed and came to his own conclusions. "Some girl gave him those violets, I'll wager; and the fellow will be sentimental for about half an hour over them."

But, now he knew that Edward had been to Arden, where in a warm nook beneath the south oriel those double violets grew, a spasm clutched at his heart.

"And so they gave you violets?" he said, tranquilly.

"Violets? What violets?" asked the other, with an unsuccessful effort to appear indifferent.

"Those in your room. They scent the house. Love and a fire cannot be hid, neither can violets."

"They were given me by the ladies of Arden," Edward explained, with an embarrassed and almost apologetic air.

"Really?" replied Paul, in dulcet tones. Then he rose and walked to the closet which contained the skeleton, and opening the door, shook his fist at the grinning skull within, uttering in a low tone the sole word "Damnation!" Then he returned to the fireside much refreshed, and quite unnoticed by his cousin, whose slight natural powers of observation were now totally obscured by the circumstance of his having fallen head-over-ears in love.

The cousins did not go to Arden next day, but on the following day the Rickmans dined with the Annesleys, and all, excepting Gervase, arrived early in the afternoon, making the house, according to their custom, their headquarters while carrying on an extensive shopping campaign.

Perhaps it was odd that Edward Annesley, who was ostensibly playing billiards at the club opposite the Berlin-wool shop, should, after long reconnoitring at the window, bethink him that Mrs. Annesley had lamented having come to the end of her knitting-

cotton, and straightway sally forth and enter the fancy-work shop, where he appeared as much surprised to find the Arden ladies as they were to see him.

"I want—ah!—some cotton—to knit with," he explained in answer to the shopwoman, when Sibyl told him that she had thought knitting as a means to kill time was confined to the lower ranks of the army, and was not affected by officers.

"Officers," he replied with solemnity, "are always delighted to be useful—when they can."

"A capital proviso," replied Sibyl. "I should have thought being ornamental exhausted their energies."

"Do not heed that mad girl," said Alice, smiling indulgently; "she is out for a holiday."

But he heard a great many more teasing remarks that afternoon from Sibyl, whose grace and dainty manner carried her safely through much that in others might have seemed pert, and the end of it was that Paul, who came in to tea on purpose to meet the Arden ladies, was scandalized to see the two younger walking leisurely up the street, accompanied by his cousin, laden with books from the library.

Mrs. Annesley laughed when she heard of her nephew's civility in buying cotton for her; but Paul looked very grim, and watched him closely all the evening.

Edward sang to Sibyl's accompaniment, and turned her leaves for her when she sang, and then he sat by her side and talked; while Alice played to Gervase's violin, and the elders, including the watchful Paul, played whist.

No word or movement on Alice's part escaped Edward's notice; but something, which was partly the chivalry of deep feeling, and partly the perverse fate which besets lovers, made him careful to conceal his interest in her, and appear more occupied with Sibyl whom he cordially liked. Thus Paul was put on a wrong scent, and was more genial to him that night than ever.

"Sibyl is undoubtedly the attraction," he thought.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

APPLE-BLOSSOMS.

A FEW weeks after Edward Annesley left Medington, which he did without again meeting the Manor family, Paul unexpectedly arrived at the garrison town in which his cousin was quartered, and spent some days with him, in a dejected frame of mind. Before returning to Medington, he reminded Edward of his promise given on his first evening at Medington, to the effect that he would not spoil his chance of success at Arden Manor, which the latter renewed, laughing at his cousin's seriousness. Paul then spoke of his wishes with regard to Alice Lingard, whose name he did not mention, and of the pecuniary difficulties which prevented him from asking her to marry him. But he did not say that he was actually in debt, having lost heavily through running Diana in a steeplechase, nor did he say that he was in the habit of associating with men of ample means, notably the Highland officers to whom Captain McIlvray had introduced him, and sharing in amusements that he could not afford.

"Don't you think," Edward said, "that your mother would furnish funds for the marriage? She must know that marriage is an advantage to a doctor, and she is very fond of you."

"She is the best of mothers; but she would never see that we could not all live under one roof. And I would never subject any girl to *that*. The fact is," he broke out after a gloomy pause, "my life is wretched. But when I think of *her*"—here his face changed and his eyes kindled,—"it is all different: there is something to live for. It is maddening that I dare not speak yet. Heaven only knows when I shall be in a position to do so, and in the meantime there she is in her youth and beauty exposed to the attentions of every chance comer. And it cannot go on for ever. I hate every man who goes to that house; I feel that unless I am quick, the fated man must come at last. I tell you, Ned, it is the torture of hell."

His cousin advised him to end his suspense at once. "You stand upon a fanciful punctilio, Paul," he said, "and for that you may spoil her life as well as your own. Speak to her and ask her to wait for you. You have a profession and a fair start in it, not to speak of the Gledesworth contingency, and hope will give you courage to win your way. If she loves you, she will be glad to wait; and if she does not, why the sooner you know it the sooner you will get over it and form other ties."

"Get over it!" cried Paul, looking up. "A man does not get over such a passion as this. Certainly not a man of my paste. Why only to see her is heaven, and to be without her, hell. The Mowbrays never do anything by halves."

"Then do not do this by halves," returned Edward cheerily. "Lay siege to her affections at once, and make up your mind to win her. And if you had not a penny in the world, is it a light thing to offer a heart like yours? I hear men talk of women, and I hear them speak of their sweethearts and wives, but I never hear men speak as you do. I believe, Paul, that a deep and serious passion is a very rare gift from Heaven. And I believe there is nothing like it in the whole world. Nothing so lifts a man from earth and reveals Heaven to him, nothing so makes him hate and despise his meaner self, nothing——"

"By Jove," interrupted Paul, with a genial laugh, "the youngster has got the complaint himself!"

Edward replied that he might take a worse malady, and reiterated his advice with regard to decisive measures, and they parted, Edward marvelling at Paul's dejection and discontent.

He did not know how deeply Paul had yearned for a military life, and what it had cost him to obey his mother's wishes in renouncing it, nor did he know why Paul had taken that little holiday and fled to Portsmouth. It was because the demon had once more entered into Mrs. Annesley.

"What a sweet woman dear Mrs. Annesley is!" the curate's wife was saying at the Dorcas meeting on the very afternoon of Paul's flight. "I wonder what keeps her away from us to-day?"

She little dreamt that it was the devil himself.

It was now mid-April, and at last there was respite from the bitter sting of the east wind; every day seemed more lovely than its fellow; in warm still nights, from the copses by the brook, the passionate music of nightingales arose, breaking the deep charmed silence and echoing through the dreams of sleepers in Arden Manor. No one there ever referred to their chance visitor of the early spring except Ellen Gale, who, when Alice paid her

accustomed visits, would sometimes allude to the voice they had heard singing past the window. "And you were right, miss; you said it was a gentleman's voice," she often repeated.

"Yes, Ellen, and the voice of a good man," Alice would reply. "There is so much in a voice."

"Yes, miss; yours quiets me down my worst days."

Alice and Sibyl were in the music-room on one of these golden afternoons, surrounded by books, easels, and other evidences of their daily employments. Sibyl's cat was coiled on the wide cushioned window-seat beneath the open lattice, through which a flood of sunshine poured; the deer-hound lay stretched on a bearskin beneath it, sleeping with one eye, and with the other lazily watching his mistress, who sat listlessly at the piano, improvising in minor keys.

The melancholy of spring was upon Alice, that strange compound of unspeakable feelings; the strenuous life of the natural world, its beauty and its melody, stirred depths in her heart that she was too young to understand; when some bird-note came with unexpected passion upon the silence, she felt as if her heart were being torn asunder and the old orphaned feeling of her childhood rushed back upon her. The simple interests of her quiet life now failed her, former occupations grew stale, there was a hardness and want of she knew not what in the brilliant sunshine and cloudless sky. She wondered if after all it were true that life, to all but the very young, is a grey and joyless thing. Hitherto the future had seemed so full of dim splendour, so pregnant with bright possibility, all of which had unaccountably faded.

As she sat at the instrument playing dreamy music, she mused upon that day of transient spring, set like a pearl in a long row of chill sullen days, when she sat busied with her flowers in the oriel and the door opened and Edward Annesley appeared. What a bright world it was into which he stepped! How long it seemed since then! He had vanished out of their life as quickly as he had entered it; no one ever mentioned him now. Perhaps he would never come again.

The thought struck chill to Alice's heart, the colour faded from her face, while the music died away beneath her nerveless fingers.

After a brief pause she began to play again, and sang with Sibyl the following duet:

"THE COMING."

"The daisies fell a tremble,
Their tips with crimson glowed,
When they hastened to assemble
In troops to line his road;

"The daisies fall a tremble
And bow beneath his feet
As they would fain dissemble
Their joy his eyes to meet;

"The roses hang to listen
From the briar across the way,
Where the morning dews still glisten,
For the first words he shall say;

"And the little breezes, bringing
Song and scent and feathered seed,
Are glad to waft his singing
Across the sunny mead.

"He cannot heed the daisies,
The roses or the breeze;
He is here—among the mazes
Of the orchard's friendly trees."

They sang the first four verses to an even-flowing melody in a major key, but the last to a more powerful measure, accompanied by minor chords which resolved themselves into exultant major harmonies to burden the phrase "he is here," which was taken up alternately by the two voices and repeated by them in different musical intervals in the manner of a fugue, so that the words "he is here" flew hither and thither, and chased each other above the harmony in a rapture that seemed as if it would never end, until the last lines rounded off the song in a joyous melody with major harmonies.

Scarcely had they made a silence, through which the song of a blackbird pulsed deliciously from the orchard hard by, when they were startled by the sound of a man's voice crying, "Thank you," from beneath the window.

Hubert started up with pricked ears, and the two girls went to the open lattice and looked out. Just beneath the window on the broad turf walk was a garden-seat lightly shaded by a tall apple-tree, leafless to-day, but ethereally beautiful with crimson buds and delicate open blossoms of shell-like grace, which outlined the boughs in purest red and white on the pale blue sky. Sitting there was Mrs. Rickman, and standing by her side, looking upwards with a spray of the blossoms just touching his crisp-curled hair, was Edward Annesley.

Alice flushed brightly; Sibyl turned pale.

Hubert stood beside his mistress, almost as tall as she, with his paws on the window-sill, and wagged his tail with a whine of joyous recognition; then, in his language, he courteously requested the ladies to descend and welcome the new-comer.

"We were half afraid to speak," the latter said from below. "Do, please, go on singing."

But the singers were effectually silenced, and presently came into the garden, and chairs were fetched and a circle formed beneath the glancing shadows of the apple-tree.

"Mr. Annesley has walked seven miles to see us," Mrs. Rickman said; "we must make him welcome."

"You are welcome, Mr. Annesley," Alice replied, with her exquisite smile and tranquil voice.

"Oh! yes; we are glad to see you," added Sibyl in her light treble; "it is not every day that people trouble themselves to walk seven miles to see us."

Then Edward said that he would not have accepted his invitation to stay with his friends, had they not lived within a walk of Arden, and as soon as he had said it, he knew that he had gone too far, and every one except Mrs. Rickman, who had a happy knack of seeing nothing that was not delightful, saw it too.

"Then," asked this innocent lady, "why not spend a few days with us?" This was exactly what he longed to do, but he was too confounded by his bare-faced hint to reply at first. "What a clown she must think me!" was his inward reflection.

Then Mr. Rickman came out with the half-waked air with which he usually regarded the outer world, and having with difficulty detached his mind to some extent from the consideration of a human bone, that was probably pre-Adamite, and fixed it on his guest, added his hospitable entreaties to those of Mrs. Rickman. Finally it was decided that Annesley should take up his quarters there and then at the Manor, sending a messenger, with explanations, for his portmanteau.

Alice looked down on Hubert, whose graceful head lay on her knee, during this discussion; but Edward watched her face and thought he saw a pleased look steal over it when the decision was finally reached, and just then she looked up and met his earnest gaze, and all the beauty of the spring rushed into these two young hearts.

In the meantime Paul Annesley, who had now recovered from the temporary despondency which drove him away from home, was enjoying that lovely April afternoon with the intensity that he was wont to throw into everything, and was at that very moment driving along the dusty high-road as fast as the Admiral could trot, in the direction of Arden. A set of archery materials had arrived at the Manor, and he had received instructions to come over as soon as he could find time, to help the ladies learn shooting; not that he waited for invitations to that house, but a

valid excuse for wasting an hour there was extremely pleasant. He drove into the stable yard on reaching the Manor, and, hearing that the family were all in the garden, took his way thither without ceremony, and when he issued from the dark yew walk which opened into the lowest terrace saw a tableau which struck him dumb.

At the top of the long and broad turf walk was a target; down against the house stood Alice in the act of drawing a bow; her hands were being placed in the right position by Edward, whom he had every reason to suppose miles away. Sibyl, leaning upon a bow at some distance, was looking on, and teasing Alice for her want of skill. Mr. and Mrs. Rickman were watching the scene from beneath the apple-tree, and Hubert, sitting very straight on his tail, was gazing intently before him, evidently turning over in his mind whether he ought to permit so great a liberty to be taken with his mistress. Alice drew her bow, the arrow flew singing towards the target, the extreme edge of which it just grazed. Edward uttered a word of applause, which Sibyl joyously echoed; nobody heard Paul's quick footfall upon the turf walk, except Hubert, who rose and thrust his muzzle into his hand, so that he stood for some moments silently watching the progress of the shooting with a deadly conviction that he was not wanted there. Perhaps Edward looked a little guilty when he saw his cousin, and took some quite needless trouble to explain how he came to be there, but perhaps it was only Paul's fancy.

"You have been before me, Ned," he said, after he had been duly welcomed, and in reply to these laboured explanations; "I came to start the shooting. You appear to be a past master in the craft."

"Oh! yes. We have a good deal of archery. I believe you are a good shot. Now we can have a regular match."

But Paul's pleasure in the pastime was gone, he scarcely knew why. He had a great mind to go away and say he was engaged, but on reflecting that this vengeance would fall only on himself, thought better of it and remained, apparently in the happiest mood.

CHAPTER II.

ARCHERY.

"AND what do 'em call this yere sport?" asked Raysh Squire, who was helping the gardener in an extra spell of work at a little distance from the archers, and, having now finished setting in a row of young plants along a taut string, was pausing to contemplate his work with an admiring eye. "Zimple it looks; mis'able zimple."

"Archardry, they calls it," replied Jabez, finishing his own line of plants, and unbending his body slowly till he reached his normal height; "calls it archardry, along o' doing it nigh a archard. Poor sport, I 'lows; give me skittles or quoits."

"'Tis poor sport, Jabez," returned Raysh, impressively, "vur the likes of we. But I hreckon it 's good enough vur gentry. Mis'able dull they be, poor things, to be zure. My wuld ooman, she zes to me, 'Lard, how I pities they poor gentlefolk, Raysh.' she zes; 'vorced to zet wi' clane hands from morning to night athout zo much as a bit of vittles to hready,' she zes. Terble hard putt to they be to beat out the time athout siling their hands. Archardry 's good enough vur they, Jabez Young. But give me a gaäme of bowls and a mug of harvest ale." And Raysh majestically bent his long body till he reached his line of string, which he pulled up and posted further on, when he dibbled a second row of holes along its course, Jabez, a stout fellow in the prime of life, looking on admiringly till Raysh was half-way down his row, when it occurred to him to pull up his own line and post it afresh.

"I dunno," Jabez observed, when he had planted half this line, "but what I'd as zoon hae nothen to do mezelf."

"Ah, you dunno what's good vor 'ee," returned Raysh, with tolerant contempt; "you ain't never ben tried that way, Jabez; your calling is entirely gineral. So zoon as you putts zummat into ground, zummat comes out on't, and you never zets down, zo to zay. Now buryen 's entirely different."

"You med zay zo, Raysh Squire," said Jabez; "what you putts into ground bides a powerful long time there, I 'lows."

"I 'lows it do, Jabez, when putt in in a eddicated way. I've

a-knowed they as turns over coffins what ain't more than a score o' years old. Buryen of mankind, Jabez Young, is a responsive traäde; 'taint everybody, mind, what's equal to it. You med take your oath of that. You minds when the Queen zent vor me to Belminster aboût that there bigamy job, when Sally White vound out Jim had had two missuses aready? Passun and me sweared we married 'em regular. Pretty nigh drove me crazy, that did. There they kept me two martial days athout zo much as a bell to pull or a church to clane. Two martial days I bid about they there streets till I pretty nigh gaped my jaws out o' jint. 'I'd a give vive shiln if I could a brought my church and churchyard along wi' me, or had ar' a babby to christen, or so much as a hrow of taties to dig. 'Missus,' I sez to the ooman what kept the house we bid in, 'wullee let mẽ chop a bit o' vireood vor ee? I be that dull,' I zes. 'Iss, that I ool!' she zes. 'And the moor you chops the better you'll plaze me,' she zes, and she laffed, I 'lows that ooman did laff. Zimmed as though I'd a lost mezelf. 'Where's Raysh Squire?' I zimmed to zay inzide o' mezelf all day long. But zo zoon as I heft that ar chopper, I zimmed to come right agen. 'I minds who I be now,' sez I. 'I be Raysh Squire, clerk and zexton o' Arden perish, aye, that I be,' and dedn't I chop that ar ooman's ood!"

"I never ben to Belminster; mis'able big plaäce, bent it?"

"Big enough, but ter'ble dull; nothen to zee but shops and churches over and over agen. Jim White, he took me along to see the plaäce. We went and gaped at the cathedral; powerful big he was—I 'lows you'd stare if you zeen he. Jim, he shown me a girt vield wi' trees in it outside of 'en, and girt houses pretty nigh so big as the Manor yender all hround. 'This here's the Close,' he zes. 'But where be the beästes?' zes I. 'Beästes?' a zes, 'Goo on wi' ye, ye girt zote,' a zes; 'there baint no beästes in this yer Close. 'Tis passuns they keeps here, taint beästes!' Zure enough, there was passuns gwine in and out o' they housen, and a girt high wall all hround to pen 'em in. Ay, they keeps em there avore they makes em into bishops," he explained, with a magnificent air of wisdom, fully justified in this instance by his ecclesiastical profession, as Jabez reflected while slowly digesting this piece of information.

The old-fashioned garden lay on a slope, the vegetable portion being only separated from the flower-borders on either side the broad turf walks which intersected it, by espalier fruit-trees, now studded with the crimson silk balls of the apple, or veiled with the fragrant snow of the pear, so that the archery party on the turf were well seen by the labourers on the soil, and *vice versâ*. Jabez

went on planting another row in meditative silence, until an unusually wild shot from Sibyl sent an arrow over the flower-border through some lines of springing peas, into a potato-bed, when he stopped and called out in loud reproof.

"You med so well hae the pegs in if you be gwine on like that there," he growled, when he had found the arrow and brought it back; "the haulm's entirely broke, Miss Sibyl, that 'tes."

"Never mind, Jabez," she replied soothingly, "it is the first time;" and she added something about wire-netting.

"Vust time!" he grumbled, returning to his cabbages, "A onbelieven young vaggot! I never zee such a mayde vur mischief. Miss Alice, she never doos like that."

"Ay, Jabez Young, Miss Alice is a vine-growed mayde and well-mannered as ever I zee," returned Raysh, "but she's powerful high. She doos well enough Zundays and high-days when there's sickness or death, but I 'lows she's most too high vur work-a-days. Give me tother one work-a-days."

"Ay, Raysh, you was always zet on she."

"I warnt I was. I warnt I be terble zet on that ar mayde, I be. I minds her no bigger than six penneth o' hapence, a jumping into a grave alongside o' dear wuld Raysh, a hiding from her governess; well I minds she. I couldn't never abide buoys, but that ar mayde, I was terble zet on she. I warnt I was. She caint do nothun athout Raysh, 'tes Raysh here and Raysh there. She's growed up mis'able pretty. All the young chaps is drawed after she, 'tother one's too high vor em. She aint vur work-a-days, Miss Alice aint. She thinks a powerful dale of me, too, do Miss Alice, she always hev a looked up to me, zame as Miss Sibyl there. Never plays nothen on the organ, athout I likes. Its 'How do that goo, Raysh?' or 'Baint that slow enough, Raysh?' Ay, they thinks a powerful lot of me, they maydes."

"Miss Alice is the prettier spoke," said Jabez. "Ah! there goos that young vaggot again! Hright athirt my beäns! Take em all hround, I 'lows you won't find two better-mannered young ladies than ourn in all the country zide."

"I warnt you wunt, Jabez Young, or two what shows more respect to they as knows better than theirselves. I never wouldn't hae no zaäce from em when they was little. A power o' thought I've a giv' to they maydes' manners, to be zure, a power of thought. Mr. Gervase too, as onbelievin a buoy as ever I zee, and that vore-right he couldn't hardly hold hisself together, and a well-spoken young vellow he's growed up. Our Mr. Horace wont be nothen to he. Passun he spared the hrod and I 'lows he've a spiled the child, as is hwrote in the Bible." And he bent over the fragrant

earth again with a slow smile of complacency extending the wrinkles of his face laterally, unconsciously cheered as he worked by the merry call of a cuckoo, the melody of the song-birds, the voices of the archers and the frequent and musical laugh of Sibyl.

"There never was such a mayde for laughen!" Raysh observed of his favourite, "that open-hearted!"

Alice laughed more rarely, though she, too, could laugh musically. It is odd that only women and children laugh gracefully; grown men, if they venture beyond a restrained chuckle, bluster out into an absurd crowing falsetto or a deep blatant haw-haw, infectious, mirth-provoking, but utterly undignified. Gervase Rickman knew this, and since the loss of his boy-voice had not laughed aloud, except at public meetings, when he produced an ironical laugh of practised excellence, which was calculated to discomfit the most brazen-nerved speaker. When he came home that evening and heard his sister's pretty laugh wafted across the sunny flowery garden, amid the music of the blackbirds and the cooing of the far-off doves, something in it—it may have been the certainty that it was too joyous to last, it may have been the tragic propinquity of deep joy to sorrow—touched his heart with vague pain. For Sibyl was the darling of his heart; he was proud of her beauty and talents, and cherished for her schemes and visions which he was too wise to give voice to.

He too was dismayed at the unexpected apparition of the younger Annesley, but he did not realize the full horror of the situation, since he naturally concluded that he had come in Paul's train, and would leave with him before long.

He declined to shoot, with the remark that lookers-on see most of the game, and sat beneath the apple-tree with his father, on whom the pleasantness of the scene and the unusual beauty of the day had prevailed over the charms of the pre-Adamite bone for an hour or two, and his mother, who had fallen completely into the womanly groove of enjoying life at second-hand.

Though they looked upon the same scene, the son and the parents saw each a different picture. It was a pleasant scene in its way. The old-fashioned garden, with its bands of deep velvet turf, its fairy troops of tall narcissus drawn up in the borders, their slender green lances firmly poised, their shining flower-faces turned as if in sympathy with their youth and beauty to the young people near them; with the evening sunbeams touching the living snow of pear and cherry blossom on the net-work of fruit-trees with a glow as ethereal as that which departing day kindles on Alpine summits; and with the stern grey ridge of the downs outlined against the sky in the background. The square

massive tower catching the warm sunlight on the right, and the dark firs, darker by contrast with the bright sky, on the left, made a pretty setting for the group of archers on the green beneath the crimson apple-bloom. Such was the actual picture, but Heaven only knows what Gervase saw besides.

Nor could any one guess what visions, hopes, ambitions and restless schemes passed through his busy brain as he strolled about with a tranquil, thoughtful air. Nor did any one suspect the less vehement ambition, though not less vehement passion, concealed by the smile upon Paul's scarred face, and flashing fitfully in his dark-blue eyes, the occasional spasms of anguish that tore him and the struggle that raged within him, or the deep feeling that gave Edward's features a more spiritual beauty, or the vestal flame of unconscious passion that burnt on the altars of the two girls' hearts.

Alice had forgotten her recent melancholy, and when she remembered it later, thought it only natural that the arrival of an unexpected guest and the interest of the archery should disperse the temporary cloud and put her in unusual spirits, while Sibyl, who was more introspective and who sometimes rebelled against the monotony of their simple life, was conscious of a tranquil expectancy that cast a glamour over everything and gave the very apple-blossoms a new beauty.

The few words which passed between Edward and Paul Annesley that evening were of such a nature that the former came to the conclusion that something must have disagreed with the doctor. But indigestion is not the direst scourge of humanity. Jealousy is far more painful.

Not that the unfortunate young man yielded to it. His better nature revolted against it. He reflected on Edward's promise and on his admiration of Sibyl, and succeeded for a time in stifling the flame of this uncomfortable passion, when a trivial incident made the smouldering fire blaze up with redoubled fury.

Alice, wearing some narcissus in her dress, was bending to pick up her glove, when she dropped a flower without perceiving it. Edward, who was just behind her, stooped as she passed on, and, with a rapid dexterity which must have baffled any but the Argus eyes of jealousy, caught up the flower and hid it in his coat, occupied apparently all the time in stringing a bow.

Only Paul saw the flower episode; he saw and felt and turned pale, a symptom of mental perturbation which did not escape Gervase Rickman, who pondered upon it.

Gnawed as he was by these jealous feelings, Paul could not tear himself from the scene which constantly renewed his sufferings,

but lingered till the twilight, when it was still so warm that Gervase's violin was brought out and part-songs were sung, till a nightingale began its golden gurgle hard by and charmed them all into silence.

Perhaps it was something in Sibyl's face, upturned with a rapt look towards the ruddy mass of apple-bloom, as she listened to the splendid song, which enlightened her brother, and so wrought upon him that he drew his bow fiercely across the strings of the violin, and, using a minor key, played with such pathos that it seemed as if he were touching the sensitive chords of his own heart and thus wrought upon those of his listeners. He knew now why Sibyl was so deeply interested in military things and had of late made such martial poems, why she had enquired specially into the functions of artillery and the degree of peril to which artillery officers are exposed when in action, and he saw through the innocent artifice which assigned reasons for this sudden interest and made her avoid the most casual reference to one particular artillery soldier. Then he thought of Edward's evident admiration for Sibyl, and the attentions he had paid her, and resolved that Edward should marry her, a consummation that, as he thought, his strong will and subtle brain could certainly bring about. There was nothing on earth so dear to him as Sibyl's happiness, he imagined, scarcely even his own; and his melodies grew wilder and more heart-piercing, as he thought these things.

"I never remember such weather for April," Sibyl said later, feeling vaguely that a day so exceptional could not be repeated.

"There has been no such April since you were born," her father replied. "Too good to last."

Yet it lasted through the three idyllic days that Edward Annesley spent at Arden.

CHAPTER III.

SUNSET ON ARDEN DOWN.

Footsteps were so rare on the lonely road which led past the "Traveller's Rest," that it was scarcely possible for any to pass unheard by at least one of the inmates of that solitary dwelling. Ellen Gale had listened for them as a break in life's monotony when in health and actively employed, and now, in the long solitary silences of her fading life, they had become the leading events of day and night, and much practice had taught her to discriminate them with such nicety that she could tell from their peculiar ring on the hard road whether they were those of youth or age, man or woman, gentle or simple. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon there would be a double footfall, light, yet lingering, and she knew that sweethearts were passing, and wondered what the end of their wooing might be. And then at times some memory stabbed her to the heart, and she turned her face to the wall.

"Quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
Menò costoro———"

cried Dante, his pity mingled with something akin to envy, when he met the lovers of Rimini, united for ever in the terrible tempestuous hell, whither so many sweet thoughts had brought them.

Sitting at the window one bright April evening, Ellen heard the heavy, dragging steps of a labouring man whose youth was worn out of him, and she knew by their ring that they were those of Daniel Pink, the shepherd.

"You goo on, Eln," cried her father, sceptically, when she told him who was coming, "you caint tell by the sound."

"I warnt she can," corrected Mam Gale, Jacob's mother, who was moving about before the hearth-fire, busy with ironing, "terble keen of hearing she be, to be zure."

Ellen smiled with innocent triumph when she perceived the weather-beaten form of the shepherd turn in at the wicket, and clank with a heavy angular gait over the large flints with which the court was pitched, followed by his shaggy dog.

"Ay, here ee be, zurely, Jacob," said Mam Gale, looking up from her ironing with a slow smile. "Come on in, Dan'l," she added, raising her voice to a shrill pitch. "How be ye?"

"Evening," said the shepherd, stumbling heavily over the flagged floor of the kitchen, and dropping himself on to a settle by the fire, while Jacob Gale, briefly acknowledging his entrance by a sullen nod, and a "Warm 's ev'nen," kept his seat on the opposite side of the fire, and smoked on.

"How d'ye zim, Eln?" asked the shepherd, after some minutes' silence, during which the click of Mam Gale's iron and the song of the kettle on the fire were heard.

Ellen replied cheerfully that she was better, and hoped to get out in a day or two; and she looked yearningly out of the window, where she could see the blue sky and some martins, who were busy building a nest in the thatched eave above with much happy twittering and fuss.

"They be allays like that in a decline, when they be took for death," said Mam Gale, lugubriously, "poor things, towards the end they perks up. The many I've zeen goo, shepherd."

"When be ye gwine to 'Straylia, Reub?" asked the shepherd.

"Not avore Ellen's took," he replied.

"And he baint agwine then, Dan'l," added Mam Gale, suspending her ironing. "What call have he to goo vlying in the vaäce o' Providence, when's time's come vor'n to goo? Downright wicked I calls it."

"Zims as though you med zo well hae a chance to live, Reub," suggested the shepherd, taking the tankard Reuben brought him, and applying his bearded face to it; after which he paused, smacking his lips and pondering deeply upon the flavour of the draught.

"I med so well live," repeated Reuben wistfully.

"Everythink's upside down out there," said Mam Gale, contemptuously; "the minister he zes to me, ee zes, volks walks along head downwards over there, ee zes."

"And that's what Willum Black zes, zure enough," echoed Jacob, solemnly; "'s brother went out 'Straylia; ee zes as how the zun hrises evenings when volks wants to go to bed, and goes down agen mornings when 'tis time to get up, out there."

"Zo they zes," added Mam Gale, dubiously. "Volk zays there's winter hright in the middle o' summer there."

"How do the carn grow if they gets winter weather in zummertime?" asked the shepherd, after profound meditation.

Reuben supposed that it grew in the winter, and silent meditation followed, broken only by Mam Gale's reiterated assertions

to the accompaniment of the clicking iron that "volk med zo well be buried comfortable in Arden church lytten, as goo about head downwards out there."

"A-ah!" growled Jacob, before leaving the room to receive an approaching customer, "I don't hold wi' these yer new-fangled notions. Volk used to die natural deaths right zide uppermost in my young days."

Then the shepherd, seizing an opportunity for which he had long been waiting, and diving deep into the recesses of his garments for something which he extracted with difficulty, produced two large ripe oranges.

"My missus zeen em in Medington, and she minded ye," he said apologetically, looking with a beaming face at the oranges, which from long propinquity to it were almost as warm as the good fellow's heart; "taint only dreppence, she zaid, and Ellen Gale med so well hae em when she can get em."

"It was very kind," replied Ellen; and the shepherd sank into a pleased silence, and gazed steadily at the pretty fading girl and at the oranges on the window-sill before her beside the bunch of wall-flowers and polyanthus he had silently placed there on his entrance.

"Mis'ble zet on vlowers, my missus is," he continued. "'Let the vlowers bide longside of the taäties,' she zes, 'vlowers don't ate nothing.' Taäties is vlower enough vur me."

"Flowers don't do here," Ellen said, "it is too keen. The doctor says it's too keen for me, but healthy for sound chestes."

"Some thinks Dr. Annesley aint wold enough for his work," the shepherd said; "Davis is the man for they."

"If he aint wold enough aready, he never will be, Dan'l Pink," retorted Mam Gale with decision. "He've a helped dree on us off. I don't hold with new-vangled things. Give me a dactor what hev zeen all our volks off comfortable."

"Davis hev buried a tidy lot," urged the shepherd. "Come to that, he and his vather avore un have helped so many under ground as Annesley and his vather put together."

"You med talk, Dan'l Pink," retorted Mam Gale, tossing her ironed linen aside with scorn, "but you wunt vind a cleverer dacter than ourn in a week o' Zundays. 'S vather, wold Annesley, was cleverer drunk than any of t'others sober."

"You may say that, mother," added Jacob, returning; "you minds when he come in one wet day and drinked a pint of best spirits straight off. Zes to me, when he went away, he zes, 'Don't you never marry a 'ooman with a tongue, Jacob Gale, or

you med want to wet yourn with summat stronger than water.' Didn't zim no drunker than Dan'l there, that a didn't."

"I never yeard the wold chap drinked avore," said Daniel, meditatively.

"It wasn't knowed not to zay in a general way," added Jacob, "'wold chap knowed how to carr 's liquor and a didn't drink reg'lar. Married the wrong ooman, that's where 'twas."

"She was a vast too good vor 'n," added Mam Gale; "her family was high and her ways was high, and he knowed he wasn't the biggest man in 's own house. That's the way with men. They cain't abide to be zecond best indoors, whatever they med be outdoors."

"Zure enough, a ooman didn't ought to be better than a man, 't aint natural like," commented Jacob. "It's agen the Bible; vur why? Eve yet the apple, and Adam he thought he med so well jine in."

"Let he alone vur that when ee zeen 'twas hripe un," commented Mam Gale with severity.

The shepherd was so struck by Jacob's observation, that he remained silently gazing at the window, through which the glories of an April sunset could be seen diffused over the wide reach of sky, for five full minutes, while his rough-coated dog, who had followed him in and lain tranquilly dozing at his feet, roused by the thoughtful look on his master's face, sat up and watched him, hoping for a signal to move.

While the shepherd gazed thus, he observed a change in Ellen's face, which was just before him—a change like that in the sky when the red flush of sunset spread across it a moment before, a brightening of hue and a sublimation of expression which filled him with awe. "She's a thinking of kingdom come, where she's bound before long," he reflected.

But it was a more tangible gladness, though it partook of the deepest charm of that undiscovered land, the joy in what is higher and dearer than self, which thus transfigured Ellen's pretty hectic face; it was the sight of two figures whose outlines were traced upon the pink-flushed sky, two young figures followed by a hound; they talked as they went, their faces lighted with the changing rose-tints of the tranquil evening.

"Miss Lingard! so late!" exclaimed Ellen.

"And young Mr. Annesley 'long with her," commented Reuben, rising and looking out.

"I hreckon she've vound somebody to keep company with at last," added Mam Gale, comprehending the situation at a glance. "Personable she be and pleasant spoke as ever I known. But

t'other one hevs all the sweethearts. Menvolk never knows what's what."

Little did Alice imagine the construction that would be put upon this innocent evening stroll. Reuben's disinclination, or rather that of his friends, to the emigration scheme Paul and Alice had arranged together, had been discussed in family conclave that day, and Edward had again brought forward his suggestion that Reuben, if still sound, should enlist in an India-bound regiment and thus get the benefit of a few warm winters. Alice had just started to broach the subject that evening, when Sibyl suddenly suggested that Edward had better follow her, and thus explain clearly what he intended.

"A capital idea," added innocent Mrs. Rickman. "You will soon overtake her if you make haste."

He did not wait for a second bidding, and Alice had not crossed the first field before Edward was by her side.

He was to leave Arden next morning, and the consciousness of this brought something into his manner that he would not otherwise have suffered. He spoke of his prospects, the earliest date at which he hoped to be promoted, and the chances of remunerative employment open to him, and Alice listened with a courteous attention, beneath which he hoped rather than saw something warmer. He referred to the Swiss tour projected by the Rickmans for the autumn, and to his own intention, favoured by Mrs. Rickman, of making the same tour at the same time, and they both agreed that, to make the excursion perfect, Paul, whose mother was to be of the party, should manage to be with them.

Nothing more of a personal nature was said, but they each felt that this evening walk made a change in their lives, putting a barrier between all the days which went before and all that were to follow after. They strolled slowly along in the delicious air, pausing to see the purple hills dark against the translucent western sky, the colouring of which spread upwards, first gold, then primrose and pale green edged with violet, to clearest blue, just flecked by little floating clouds like cars of gold and pearl; pausing to look eastward across the plain to the line of grey-blue sea, and to listen to some deeper burst of melody from the woods and sky; pausing, above all, at the chalk quarry, a mysterious melancholy place, haunted by legends and traditions. Standing, as they did, on the high-road leading past the wide entrance to it, they saw a broad level of white chalk, broken here and there by a milky pool, a small tiled hut and dark shadow-like spots upon which a slow accretion of mould had encouraged a faint green growth, half moss, half grass, and surrounded by an almost

semicircular wall of grey chalk cliff with a narrow dark outline of turf, drawn with sharp accuracy between it and the sky. This cold pale cliff was shaded and veined here and there, where no quarrying had been recently done, by such beginnings of vegetation as clouded the ground, and was broken further by one or two black spots, which were caves. Some ravens flew croaking from their holes in the cliff-face with a grim effect, which the swallows darting about in the sunshine and the larks singing above could not wholly neutralize.

Perhaps it was the sense of contrast between themselves and this desolate scene that made them linger in fascinated silence before it, and while they lingered, the light changed, the sinking sunbeams filled the sky with molten gold, and the rampart of cliff turned from ghastly grey to warm yellow; then it glowed deep orange, and at last it blushed purest rose.

"I shall never forget this," Edward said, when they turned and he saw the face of Alice suffused with rose-light against the rose-red cliffs.

A few more steps took them to the inn on the crest of the hill. The shepherd rose and left at their approach, and the new-comers entered the kitchen, which seemed dark after the brightness outside. Mam Gale's wrinkled bronzed face, surrounded by a white-frilled cap tied under her chin, beamed with welcome; her purple-veined, labour-darkened hands and arms, which were always visible below the small plaid shawl pinned tightly over her bowed shoulders, ceased to ply the iron, and she came forwards to hand chairs to the visitors. The dull glow from the hearth emphasized rather than dispersed the gloom of the low smoke-browned kitchen, so that it was scarcely possible to see even the shining crockery on the black oak dresser, the two great china dogs and brass candlesticks on the high chimney-piece and the gaily coloured prints on the walls, and the eye turned with relief to the small window, where the fading light came through the tiny leaded panes and centred itself on the face of Ellen, turned towards the sky as if awaiting a benediction, while the men's faces were in shadow. Alice went to the window and kissed Ellen's too brightly tinted face, her own looking more healthy by contrast, and the sight of the two young women, illumined by the last fading rays of light, touched Edward and made a picture that long afterwards he liked to dwell upon. He remained silent, while Alice took the chair offered her and plunged at once into the subject of Reuben's enlistment, a proposal received at first with stupefied dismay.

Mam Gale dropped thunderstruck upon a chair, regardless of

the pile of freshly ironed caps she crushed beneath her. "Our Hreub goo vur a soldier," she cried, when her indignation at last found voice; "Hreub what never drinked nor done aught agen the Commandments! Our Hreuben 'list! We've azeen a vast of trouble, Miss Lingard, but we never known disgrace avore!"

It was no use for Edward to plead his own example; Mam Gale bid him remember what Reuben owed to his position in life. "'Taint no harm vur gentlevolk, they can do without characters and haint no call to be respectable," she said; "but our Hreub, what have always looked up to hisself, it do zim cruel to let he down."

Jacob was too horrified to utter a word of remonstrance; but Ellen, whose imagination was fired by a vision of her brother in regimentals, went so far as to say that she had heard of respectable soldiers. Reuben eagerly corroborated her, and Jacob and his mother had so far recovered from the shock as to listen to Edward's proposals, when the sound of wheels was heard, a vehicle stopped at the wicket, and Paul Annesley's firm, quick steps struck the courtyard flints and stone passage, and he came with cheery energy, unannounced as usual, into the firelit kitchen.

"Sorry I'm so late, Mam Gale, I was called out of my way. Ellen still up? That's right, my lass;" he had proceeded thus far, his hearty, mellow voice filling the kitchen with a breath of hope and health, when he became aware of the two figures seated near each other by the window, and he stopped, as if thunderstruck, a fiery spark flashing from his eyes.

"We had better go," Alice said, turning to Edward, as she rose after acknowledging Paul's entrance. "Good-bye, Ellen, we must not take up the doctor's time."

There was something in this "we" that acted upon Paul like fire upon gunpowder, and he viciously ground his teeth.

He assured them that there was no need for them to go, but they went nevertheless, and he then stood before the window, talking to Ellen. He looked out into the violet dusk, watching intently while the two figures lessened and finally disappeared, and Ellen wondered at the strange look on his face, which she had only known hitherto full of kindness and good-humour, and at the preoccupied manner that made him ask the same questions over again. His visit was as brief as he could make it. An irresistible power drew him; he sprang quickly to his seat and set the Admiral off at his best pace, but avoided the nearest way home, choosing that which led past Arden Cross.

The fleeting glory was gone from the chalk quarry, which showed desolate in its pale gloom, and seemed a fit abode for

spectres. A figure springing up behind a heap of stones by the road made the Admiral shy violently, and though it proved to be only that of a loitering child, Thomas, the groom, trembled all over and was bathed in a cold perspiration, for he knew that ghosts haunted the pit. As for his master, he punished the Admiral's mistake with such severity that the horse tore down the hill like a whirlwind, jerking the light dog-cart from side to side, and obliging the frightened Thomas to cling on with his hands, while the white-heat of passion kept his master firm, so firm that he was able to turn his head aside and gaze steadily across the dewy hedge-rows at the two figures walking through the fields to the Manor, until the bend of the road hid them from his sight.

CHAPTER IV.

MESSRS. WHEWELL AND RICKMAN.

THE streets of Medington were all alive one sunny spring morning. Men were busy in the market-square placing hurdles for sheep and pigs; shopkeepers were turning their wares out of dark recesses, and arranging them on the pavements, to the great discomfort of passengers; carts—laden with wicker baskets, whence issued mournful cackles and quacks of remonstrance from victims unconscious of their doom, and all sorts of country produce, including stout market-women—rolled slowly into the town, drawn by thoughtful horses, who ventured upon no step without first duly pondering its advisability; small flocks of meekly protesting yet docile sheep, and disorderly herds of loudly rebellious and recalcitrant pigs, were beginning to enter the streets from divergent country roads; housemaids, giving the bell-pulls an extra Saturday cleaning, loitered over their work, and looked up and down the street, to catch sight of country friends; clerks and shopmen wished the day over and Sunday morning come with its quiet: it was market day, the least sabbatical and most bustling of the seven.

Daniel Pink was passing slowly along the High Street, his little frightened flock bleating and panting ahead of him, and seizing every opportunity for blundering into false positions to an extent that almost deprived Rough the dog of reason in the passionate indignation it aroused in his shaggy breast. Daniel laid his crook in this direction and that, and spread out his arms and grunted to his four-footed lieutenant, and was so engrossed in taking his charges safely past the vehicles and open doors through which they were eager to dart, that until he was some distance past he forgot to look as usual at Paul Annesley's door, to see if cherry-cheeked Martha, his daughter, was on the look-out. Then he threw the bunch of flowers he had carried in for her with such aim that she caught it just in time to prevent its striking the face of her master, who opened the door behind her, and to her dire confusion came out at that moment.

"Wallflowers, Martha? Curious things to clean brass with, eh?" he said, with a good-tempered smile; and he stepped

briskly down the street, his face darkening when he remembered the scene at the "Traveller's Rest" the night before.

The shepherd had been thinking of the same scene as he came along. He had related the conversation to his wife on his return to his lonely cottage, so that they had remained up beyond their usual hour talking over the dying fire; Mrs. Pink would for many days declare in the same words her conviction that it was better to die right side uppermost in England than to tempt Providence by journeying to a world in which everything was upside down, and the very Commandments were probably by analogy reversed; while Daniel would as frequently observe that they raised a "terble lot of ship" out there, that he had once known a steady youth who enlisted when crossed in love, and that Ellen might possibly see the harvest carried home.

After the last saying he would generally be silent for some time, wondering to what unknown land Ellen would journey then. A great part of Daniel Pink's time was spent in wondering; the few events of his own and other lives, however deeply pondered upon, were soon exhausted, and then there were long lonely hours in sunshine and storm, on the wide windy downs, under the shelter of a bent thorn or a wind-bowed hedge, in the silent nights when great flocks of stars passed in orderly procession over the vast black chasms of space above him, or the hurtling storm swept round him—long empty hours that had to be filled with thoughts and imaginings of some voiceless kind. And sometimes the musings of simple shepherds are grander, and their unspoken sense of the mystery and beauty which enfolds their obscure lives is deeper, than we imagine.

Gervase Rickman on his way to his office through the market, nodded condescendingly to the well-known weather-beaten figure standing among the pens. If he thought of him at all, it was as a slightly superior animal. Who expects to find a poet or a prophet beneath a smock frock or fustian jacket?

Gervase hurried along to his office, which stood just off the market-square, full of thoughts, for the most part common-place, even sordid, principally concerning the business affairs of half the county. He was later than he intended to be, and found the day's work in full swing when he stepped into the outer office, whose occupants suddenly became very diligent on his entrance. He took in every detail as he passed swiftly through, and sprang up the stairs to his own private room, followed by the white-headed clerk, who had been the confidential servant, and, by virtue of his service, master, of the firm of Whewell and Rickman since before Gervase was born.

The room had a bow-window, giving upon a street which crossed the High Street at right angles, and commanding a view of both these streets and the broad market-place at their junction. This window differed from those usual to lawyers' offices because it was perfectly clean, and its transparent panes were obscured only to a moderate height by a wire blind, transparent to those within the room, though opaque from without. Rickman's desk was so placed, that while sitting at it he could, if so minded, observe all that was passing in the focus of town life beneath this window. Not that he enjoyed such leisure as to need window-gazing to fill it up, for more business was done in that bow-windowed room than in any other in the town.

He was vexed at being a little late on this bustling market-day, and still more vexed at the cause of his delay, which was a woman. He hastened to look at the letters before him, while his roving glance swept the street as he listened to the old clerk's communications.

"Dr. Annesley called and was much put out," the latter said; "he could not wait, as he was starting on his country rounds. He wrote this note." The note was brief.

"I must have that money, no matter at what interest," it ran. "Could I raise some upon the Gledesworth prospects? Call before you leave town to-day.—P. A."

"My good fellow, why will you mix with rich and idle men?" Rickman thought to himself.

"That will do, Hughes," he said, and the old clerk left him to his work, and there was silence in the room, broken only by the rapid course of the lawyer's pen.

His face was heavy with care, and he was not quite so sure as he had been of the potency of human will, and especially of his own. The check Alice Lingard had given him two days before on Arden Down, when he had formally asked her to marry him, hurried on to decisive measures by the necessity of putting a stop to Edward Annesley's apparent designs, was severe and far less easy to bear than he had anticipated—for he was too good an observer not to have known that Alice would never accept his first offer; he relied upon time and circumstance, the power of his will and the continued stress of his passion, which was patient as well as ardent, to win her.

"My mother," he reflected, while another portion of his active brain was occupied with the subject beneath his pen, "is the most amiable of human beings, but she is the most simple and

unobservant. My father has talents, but with regard to all that concerns human life and conduct he is an infant in arms. How on earth Sibyl and I came by our brains, Heaven alone knows; on the whole we should be thankful that we have any. If that stupid little Sib would but take a fancy to Paul she might catch him at the rebound. And Paul has expectations. Paul saw them together last night and enjoyed it as much as I did. But women are so unreliable, they upset all one's calculations, one never knows what they will do next. As for that good-looking fool——" Gervase sighed and paused in his work; he did not like to admit to himself that he had made too light of him, yet he feared it, and when he thought of Sibyl's secret he burned with hatred for the man who had so deeply touched her heart. He looked out upon the thickening stream of passengers in the street and saw one of whom he made a mental note, and went on writing with the under-current thought that nothing was any good without Alice, and that the very strength of his desire for her love was sufficient warrant for his winning it. "And what a man she might make of me!" he thought, perhaps with some dim deeply hidden notion of propitiating Providence with the promise of being good if he could but get his coveted toy.

While his pen flew over the paper he recalled the beginning of this attachment, now fast developing into a passion.

It was Alice's seventeenth birthday, and he was talking to his father about her affairs, when the latter remarked that she had now grown a tall young woman.

"And we shall lose her, Gervase," he added. "She will marry early. Besides her good looks, she has what men value more, money."

Then Gervase thought how convenient her little fortune would be to a man in his position, and reflected further that, ambitious as he was, he could not reasonably expect to find a better match. While thus musing, he strolled out into the garden and saw Alice, yesterday one of "the children," an overgrown girl, an encumbrance or a toy, according to the humour of the moment, gathering flowers, unconscious of his observation. It was a different Alice that he saw that day; the child was gone, giving place to a young creature who compelled his homage. He offered her his birthday congratulations with deference, his manner had a new reserve. "She shall be my wife," he said to himself with a beating heart.

Three years had passed but this purpose had not faltered. Then came the check on Arden Down. This occurred at a gipsying excursion by the Manor party, during which he found

himself alone with her. He knew that it was too early to press his suit, but Edward Annesley's visit forced his hand.

Alice hoped that it was but a passing fancy and tried to impress this view of the affair upon him. "You are making a mistake," she said; "you would not be happy with me. I have not even ambition. Let us forget this, dear Gervase. Otherwise I must leave you. I hope you will not drive me away from Arden. It is my only home."

They were standing by a gate on the down, looking over the plain, which stretched away with its budding trees half veiled in leafage to the blue belt of sea; cowslips nodded in the hedge near them; the great spring chorus of birds was borne faintly from the valleys up to their airy height; the world was full of music and beauty. Gervase looked straight into Alice's eyes and fascinated her by the magnetism of his glance, and he spoke as if moved by a power beyond his control.

"It is no mistake," he said. "You are the one woman for me. And I will win you," he added in deep, almost menacing tones. "It may be years first. But I *will* win you, I *shall* win you. Yes; in spite of yourself."

Alice trembled; she could not withdraw her fascinated gaze from his. The air of conviction with which he spoke seemed prophetic; her heart beat painfully; she was on the verge of tears.

But she was no weakling; she summoned all her forces to meet and defy him. "How dare you speak like that!" she said in cold, cutting tones.

"I dare," he replied, with inward trembling but outward determination, "because I love. Forgive me, Alice," he added more gently, when she turned away with a look of scorn, "I was carried away. Forget my words. Forget my folly. Let us be as we were before."

Then tears came to her relief. She quickly checked them, smiled once more, and there was peace between them. After that he was careful to suppress all traces of the lover in his manner, and she was gradually reassured. He was also careful to draw her observation to the attentions which Edward Annesley appeared to pay to Sibyl, and to confide to her his approval of the match.

That Edward was winning Alice's heart was bitter to Gervase; that he was winning Sibyl's, and threatening to spoil her life, was almost more bitter. He resolved that Sibyl's life should not be spoilt; he determined to bring Annesley to book, and show him that he was bound in honour to marry her. But this step needed the most subtle treatment; the slightest mistake would be fatal.

Besides, he feared to precipitate whatever designs Annesley might have with regard to Alice, by premature interference, and contented himself with being at Arden as much as possible during Edward's visit, and making arrangements to keep him apart from Alice during his absence, in which small schemes he was greatly aided by the transparent simplicity of his mother.

Truly this unfortunate young man had more than enough to burden his active brain, and just when it was important, in view of the approaching county election, to give his mind entirely to political affairs. Women seemed to be made expressly to torment and perplex mankind, as Raysh Squire observed of boys. If Sibyl, whom he loved with an instinctive clinging affection almost as deep as his self-love, had been but a man. "But then," he reflected, "perhaps we should have wanted the same woman. That fatal sex would still have ruined all."

He had hitherto said that he would not live without Alice; now he found that he could not. Wealth, success, power and position, things that he had yearned for and purposed to win by the strength of his intellect and energy, suddenly lost all value in themselves; without Alice they were no good.

"I must and I will have her," he muttered, dashing his pen fiercely into the ink-bottle, at the conclusion of his task.

His reflections were disturbed by the opening of the door; the not very usual sound of a lady's dress rustling over the matting was heard, and Mrs. Annesley met Gervase's fierce intense gaze with one of her seraphic smiles.

In an instant the young lawyer's glance fell, and changed to its everyday suavity as he rose with a smile, in which surprise and welcome were equally blended, to receive his unexpected visitor.

"You are doubtless surprised, Mr. Rickman," she said, taking the chair he placed for her, "that I should visit you instead of sending for you as usual. I have a reason."

"That is of course," replied Gervase. "You know I am always at your service at any moment."

"I thought your country clients would scarcely have arrived at this early hour, and I might therefore seize the opportunity of calling on you on my way home from morning prayers without attracting attention at home. My beloved son is, I fear, in sad difficulties."

"Indeed," returned Gervase, with a look of surprised interest, while he moved a paper softly over Paul's note, "I am sorry for that."

"Is it possible," continued Mrs. Annesley, studying his face

with an astonished air, "that my dear boy has not consulted even you upon the subject?"

"My dear Mrs. Annesley," returned Gervase, laughing, "do you suppose that we lawyers discuss our client's affairs even to their nearest friends?"

"True," she replied, annoyed at herself. "I had forgotten Mr. Rickman for the moment, and was thinking of my young friend, Gervase. It is most probable that you know more of these unfortunate complications than I do, for my child, I cannot tell why," she added, applying her handkerchief to her eyes, "has not honoured me with his confidence. I feel this, Mr. Rickman, as only a sensitive and devoted woman can."

"Doubtless," he said, with courteous patience. "Hang the woman! why in the world does she come here plaguing me with her feelings?" he thought.—"You have reason, then, to suppose that Paul is in difficulties of some kind upon which he has not consulted you?" he added.

"Dr. Annesley," she continued with severe dignity, "has incurred debts of honour, which he does not find himself in a position to discharge without serious inconvenience. I need scarcely tell you, Mr. Rickman, that my son's income is most insufficient for a young man of his birth and tastes. His professional success has not as yet been by any means proportioned to his talents and energy. His youth is against him. It naturally prejudices those who have every confidence in his skill. My son is proud; he prefers to make his own way, and no longer accepts an allowance from me, as you are aware. I honour his independence, but"—here she dropped her dignity, and suddenly became natural in a burst of real feeling,—"I do think he might come to me in his trouble."

"I daresay," Gervase said soothingly, while Mrs. Annesley daintily dried her tears, "that if he is, as you think, hard up, he sees his way out of the scrape, and does not wish to worry you if he can possibly help himself."

"That is just what hurts me, Gervase," replied Mrs. Annesley, still oblivious of her dignity. "He might know that I would grudge him nothing. It is hard that a man like Paul should never indulge in the tastes and amusements natural to his age. And I am ready, as he might know, to incur any sacrifice to extricate him. I would rather live in a hovel than see my son unable to meet debts of honour."

"We all know what a devoted mother he has," said the politic Gervase. "I infer, then, that you wish to find him the money."

"Exactly, dear Gervase; with your accustomed penetration you go straight to the point."

"Well, then," said Gervase, glancing unobserved at his watch, "why don't you mortgage some of your house-property? That would be better than selling stock just now. How much does he want?"

"That I believe you are in a better position to say than I am," she replied, with a dry little smile.

Gervase also smiled, and said that the mortgage should be effected at once, since he knew where to find the money, and in a surprisingly short time he contrived to get the whole of Mrs. Annesley's wishes expressed, and learnt that Paul was to be kept in doubt until the transaction was effected and the money in his mother's hands, when she intended to surprise him.

"Excellent young man," thought Mrs. Annesley, as she swept down the stairs and through the outer office, where the busy clerks inspired her with no more fellow-feeling than the sheep in the pens outside. "He has never given his mother a moment's anxiety. I suppose nothing would have induced him to run a horse unless he were quite sure of being able to pay the consequences. Quiet and prudent, the son of a mere physician, how different from my brilliant Paul! The blood of the Mowbrays is not in *his* veins." She forgot that Paul was not even the son of a physician, since Walter Annesley had been but a country doctor, whose untimely death had not improved his son's prospects.

She walked joyously home through the ever-thickening stream of vans and carts, considering what expenses she could cut down to meet the interest of the mortgage, really glad that a load of care would be lifted from Paul's heart, but anxious that he should acknowledge and admire her sacrifice; few things pleased her so much as to be considered a martyr; she was a woman who could not exist without a grievance.

She wondered how Heaven came to afflict her with such a son, though she knew very well that she would not have loved him half so well had he been steadier and less extravagant. Destiny had evidently made a mistake in setting a man of his mould to wield the lancet; perhaps that view had also occurred to Destiny, and resulted in the recent removal of Reginald Annesley from the Gledesworth succession.

CHAPTER V.

STORM.

FULL of these thoughts, Mrs. Annesley entered her house and went through her usual tranquil occupations, all of which, however homely in themselves, were characterized by a certain elegance peculiar to herself.

The maids trembled when summoned one by one to her presence to be called to account for the various doings and misdoings of the week, and were equally awed by reproof or commendation, though, being human, they preferred the latter. Certain dainty dustings of bric-à-brac by her own hands occurred on Saturdays, and the subsidiary dustings and cleanings of which they were the crown and summit, were truly awful in their immaculate perfection. She arranged fresh flowers, and terrible was the fate of that maid who brought an imperfectly-cleaned vase for their reception, or spilled the water required for them. These weekly duties were all completed, and Mrs. Annesley, arrayed in fresh laces, was sitting in the drawing-room with some elegant trifle representing needle-work in her hand, when about one o'clock the Rickmans' phaeton drove up to the door with Edward Annesley, whom she expected to lunch with her on his way from Arden.

Paul had returned from his country round, and was watching the arrival of the phaeton from the window of his consulting-room with an eager intensity strangely disproportioned to the event. The grey mare trotted in her leisurely fashion up to the door, totally ignoring the unusual stimulus of the whip, which Sibyl applied smartly, in the vain hope of infusing some dash into her paces. Mrs. Rickman occupied the front seat by her daughter's side, and was protesting against her cruelty; but the grey mare might have been a flying dragon, and these ladies harpies, for all Paul cared; his fiery glance was concentrated on the back seat, in which were Alice Lingard and his cousin. The latter was on the pavement before the vehicle had stopped. His farewells were soon said, and the phaeton drove off with the nearest approach to dash ever made by the grey mare, in response to an

unusually sharp cut of Sibyl's whip. Edward stood on the pavement looking for some moments after the vanishing carriage, with an expression that was not lost upon Paul. Then he slowly turned, crossed the pavement, turning once more in the direction of the carriage, now lost to view, and finally went up the steps and rang the bell. Paul felt that he was still looking in the direction taken by the phaeton, though he could no longer see him.

He had seen what passed between Edward and Alice at parting; only the lifting of Alice's gaze to Edward's when he wished her good-bye, but with a look so luminous that it went like a stab to Paul's heart. These things so wrought upon him, that he seized a bust of Galen from a bracket by the wall and dashed it to pieces on the ground.

He had scarcely done this, when a patient was announced and condoled with him upon the accident. Paul smiled grimly in response, and proceeded to his business, a small, but delicate operation on the eye, which he effected with a steady and skilful hand. No one in Medington knew what a skilful surgeon he was; even his mother did not credit him with professional excellence.

They were already at table when he went in to luncheon; Edward, quite unconscious of the storm he had set raging in his cousin's breast, seemed unusually friendly and pleased to see him.

"I was afraid I might miss you, after all," he said, rising and grasping his hand in a grip so warm that he did not perceive the coldness with which it was received. "I know what a chance it is to catch you at luncheon, especially on a market-day."

"Not when I have guests," replied Paul, with an extra stateliness, which Edward would have been incapable of perceiving, even if his mind had been less pre-occupied; "only the most important cases keep me from home under such circumstances."

"He never suffers the professional man to obscure the gentleman," said Mrs. Annesley.

"He would not be your son if he did," Edward returned.

Mrs. Annesley was so light of heart in consequence of her morning exploit, that she chatted away most graciously and gaily, and set Edward on the congenial theme of his visit to Arden, and the virtues of the Rickman family. Paul observed with ever-deepening gloom that he did not mention Alice, he only named Sibyl when speaking of the ladies.

After luncheon there was still an hour to waste before Edward's train was due, and he was yet unconscious of anything unusual in Paul, when the latter asked him to go out in the garden with

him. The garden was large; it extended not only by the full breadth of the house to a wall bounded by the parallel street, but ran along that street for a little distance at the back of other houses. Beneath some tall limes, the crimson-edged branches of which were now showing a few fluttering transparent leaflets, pale green against the blue sky, there was a stretch of rich deep sward, the growth of at least a century. Here were benches, and sitting on one of them, one could see the flower-garden and the back of the house half hidden in ivy and creepers.

Quite silently the young men strolled through the whole length of the garden, Edward looking at the scented hyacinths, the flowering currants, old friends he knew so well, the great elm with the long disused swing and the delicate veil of April green about its lower branches, and vaguely enjoying the mystery and richness of the spring; Paul, with his eyes cast down, his lips closed firmly, his ears deaf to the song of the blackbirds who found homes in that pleasant garden, and whose music seemed like a romantic picture painted on the prosaic background of the town noise.

Edward threw himself on a bench and stretched his legs comfortably before him in the sunshine, while he took his short pipe from his pocket and began to fill it, and was just beginning to wonder why Paul did not smoke. Then he looked up and was surprised at the expression on the face of Paul, who was standing before him, a dark figure against the sunshine.

Paul was extremely pale, his eyes appeared black with intense feeling, his lips moved as if trying to frame some speech of which he was incapable, and for a few moments he gazed silently at his cousin.

"What is the matter, Paul?" the latter asked, changing his careless attitude for a more upright posture. He had heard something of Paul's pecuniary straits, and thought that he might be on the verge of asking help of him. He knew that his introduction to Captain McIlvray had been rather unfortunate. McIlvray and Paul, being congenial spirits, had rapidly become intimate; this intimacy had brought Paul into immediate contact with the other officers of the regiment, and in turn with their friends. Those Highland officers were all men of means and family, they were nearly all unmarried, and more or less fast, and the usual consequences of a young man associating with richer men than himself had ensued. Late hours, play, moderate by a rich man's standard, but high by a poor man's, steeple-chasing by a horse due at sick people's doors, and suchlike, had combined to empty the doctor's pockets and scandalize his patients, particularly the steady-going burghers of Medington, who did not care to trust their families or

themselves to the hands of a young man, who, instead of occupying his leisure with medical books, consorted with a "set of rackety officers;" and for all this Edward felt to some extent responsible.

"I asked you," Paul replied in the incisive tones of white-hot passion, "to come out here, because I think it time to come to an understanding."

"An understanding of what? If it is money, dear fellow, I think I can promise to help you."

"Money," repeated Paul with ironical laughter, "money indeed!"

This lofty scorn of that cause of so much mischief, the lack of which is so excessively inconvenient to ordinary mortals, was less edifying than amusing in a man who was head over ears in debt, and a half smile stole over Edward's face when he heard it. A certain grandiose manner which Paul inherited from his mother, and which sometimes degenerated into affectation, often amused his simpler-mannered cousin, and provoked him to the expression of wholesome ridicule. But the tragic set of Paul's features warned him that anything in the shape of laughter would be ill-timed, so he composed his face to a decent gravity, observing that he had feared, from certain hints Paul had given, that times were hard with him, and that he was delighted to find himself mistaken.

"If it isn't money," he reflected, "it must be love. Though, how on earth I am to help him at that, I don't know."

"You seem a cup too low," he added aloud. "Come, cheer up; whatever it is, you have the world before you, and a stout pair of arms to fight it with."

"Thank you," Paul replied with sharper irony, "I am in no need of either your advice or your sympathy."

"Then, what in the world does he want?" thought the other. "It cannot be his mother's temper."

"Surely you must know what explanation I require," continued Paul, relieving his irritation by dinting the turf sharply with his heel. Edward possessed that perfect good temper which results from the combination of a good digestion, a clean conscience, and congenial circumstances; the undisturbed amiability with which he met his fiery cousin's determination to quarrel with him was most aggravating. "Is it possible," Paul thought, concentrating his blazing glance upon that cheerful face, "that this man can be such a hypocrite as well as traitor? I wish to know," he added aloud, "the object of your visits to Arden Manor?"

"Indeed?" The good-tempered face darkened now. "That is my affair." Edward rose from the bench, made a few steps

and then retraced them. "Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you brought me out here for the express purpose of asking why I visit at Arden?"

"For the express purpose," replied Paul, the breath coming audibly through his quivering nostrils.

The momentary irritation passed away and Edward laughed.

"You always were a queer fellow," he said; "but why this paternal interest in my goings and comings?"

"I warned you," continued Paul; "I explained the situation to you; I have spoken to you since of my hopes and wishes. You have indeed honoured my confidence. The very first day you went there by stealth. It was unnecessary, you might have gone openly. A second time you went by stealth when every one considered you to be miles away. Yet, after what passed in my presence, secrecy was absurd. Do you suppose me to be blind? We all know that a girl flirt delights in trying to make conquests of those who belong to others. That a man should descend so far is, I own, almost incredible. But one must believe the evidence of one's senses. That a man, I will not say a gentleman, a man with the most elementary notions of honour should deliberately pay his addresses in a quarter to which——"

"My dear Paul," interrupted Edward, keeping a grave face with difficulty, "what a ridiculous misunderstanding this is! Beware of jealousy."

"Jealousy!" cried Paul, flinging away from him with his eyes rolling. "Jealousy, indeed! I saw you," he added inconsistently, "when you said good-bye at my door to-day. And on that night I saw you placing her hands on the bow with your infernal fingers——"

"And were not jealous? Sensible fellow! Seriously you are in a painful position, and it makes you, as you told me the other day, over-sensitive; you cannot see things in their right proportions; you exaggerate trifles."

"Is it a trifle that you are almost an inmate of that house? that she gives you flowers? that you treasure up a flower she drops? that you look into her eyes as I saw you look an hour ago? that you sing with her? walk alone with her? act like an idiot when she is near? By all that is sacred——"

"Come, listen to reason; I admit you are not jealous. But, as you said the other day, it makes you wretched in this uncertain state of affairs even to hear of other men going to the house, much less being civil to her."

"Civil!"

"One must be civil to ladies, especially in their own houses. I was bound to teach her to shoot. But I am innocent of the

other crimes you impute to me, I swear I am. Look here, Paul. I will stand more from you than from any man living. But you go too far. You are hard hit and in a false position, and that makes you forget yourself. Put an end to all this, for pity's sake; ask her to marry you and have done with it."

"Have done with it; that would, no doubt, be agreeable to you," Paul repeated, with a grim smile. "But I may be mistaken, after all; you have no doubt been so obliging as to try to advance my suit by proxy."

Edward turned red when he remembered his unfortunate essay in that line in Arden churchyard.

"Nonsense," he replied, laughing. "Come, you have the field to yourself. I shall not be seeing her for weeks. In the meantime, come to the point, and let me congratulate you on being engaged before I come back again."

The easy way in which he proposed this impossible thing turned all Paul's blood to fire, made his head swim, and clouded his eyes for a moment. He knew that Edward and Alice loved each other, and, more than that, he knew that Edward, while speaking with this insolent nonchalance, was fully aware that he had won Alice's heart. The fire of inextinguishable hate burned in his breast, and the madness of jealousy possessed him; the parting look between the two pierced like a poisoned arrow to the core of his heart; it was well for him that no deadly weapon was at hand or his cousin's last words would have been spoken.

"You have no explanation to offer then?" he asked.

"There is nothing to explain. You accuse me of paying too much attention to the lady of your choice. I reply that I have not done so."

"Can you deny that you love Alice Lingard?" he urged.

"Surely you mean Sibyl?" Edward faltered, with a sudden pallor. "It was she of whom you spoke that night. I had not even heard of Miss Lingard's existence."

"Then it is true," Paul said tragically; and for some moments neither cousin could do anything but try to realize the painful situation in which they found themselves.

"It was not my mistake alone," added Edward, who was now grave enough. "Your mother jested on the subject the first night I spent there."

"Are you engaged to Miss Lingard?" Paul asked, turning a stony face, from which despair had taken all the fury, towards the pained glance of his cousin.

"No," he replied, and for the moment wished he could have said yes. If he had not already won Alice's heart, he knew that

he was on the high road to it. He might have spoken the night before, but he considered it scarcely seemly to be so precipitate. And, now that he had not actually committed himself, he did not know what to do. He had certainly injured Paul, and in a way that made atonement impossible.

"I am sorry for this," he said, after a pause, "more sorry than I can say." And yet he doubted if his advent had done Paul much harm. He had had the first chance and had missed it. But what if Alice had seemed to accept his attentions for the purpose of drawing the laggard lover on? Girls often did that. Girls like Alice? Oh, no; Alice was different; she was not to be measured by ordinary standards.

The discovery that Edward had not played him false, and that he had consequently no grievance against him, served rather to intensify the jealous anger which devoured Paul's heart. Every expression of regret on Edward's part was another assurance that Alice had been stolen from him.

"You must never see her again," he said decisively. An apple-tree covered with blossom rose behind him and traced its pink and white branches upon the clear blue sky. He turned and took a thick bough in his hands and snapped it like a stick of wax, and the pink tracery was now marked on the green turf at his feet. Edward plucked some of the red twigs of the lime-tree, and twisted them round his fingers until he nearly brought the blood. The blackbird fluted melodiously, the hum of the busy market-place went on, the church clock chimed the hour, and the gnomon of the tree-shadows changed its place on the turf-dial, while the two cousins stood silent, facing each other, divided this way and that by distracting thoughts.

"I cannot promise that," Edward replied at last. "We cannot both have her, but one must. She is not to be left to linger out her youth in doubt. I give you three months. That is a long time. Six weeks ago I had never heard of her."

Paul made another deep dent in the turf. Three months was no time, and how could he ask a woman to marry him in his present circumstances? Besides, would Alice forget Edward in three months?

Edward was asking himself the same question. He had no right to believe that she would ever think of him, and yet it seemed impossible that the stream of their lives, having once mingled, could ever divide again. But Love is jealous. Alice had known Paul for years; she admired his character; she might easily think his own feeling for her, if not followed up in those three months, a passing fancy, and would certainly quench what-

ever feeling for himself might have been germinating within her, when she saw that Paul's happiness depended upon her.

"Three months is no time," Paul said.

"You must indeed be blind," returned Edward, "if you cannot see what a tremendous advantage those three months will give you. She will think I have forgotten her."

Paul did not think so, yet he wondered that Edward could face such a possibility. After all, did this cold-blooded fellow really care for her? Surely not as he did.

"I cannot live without her," he cried in his stormy way, "and perhaps you can."

"Yes," replied Edward slowly, "I *can* live without her. Perhaps I should be no good to her. If only she is happy! If she takes you—and I cannot say that I wish that—it must be as Heaven pleases—I shall forget this, I shall try to be her friend—yes, and yours. It is something to have known her, more to have loved her. Heaven bless her! Till three months then."

He was gone.

Paul was touched. The pendulum of his impetuous nature swung to the other extreme. He could not have yielded that advantage, and he thought that if Alice took Edward she would take the better man. He remembered what a golden strand his cousin's friendship had woven in his lonely childhood and through all his life. A thousand forgotten things revived in his memory; he thought what a good fellow Edward was! what days they had had together! He knew that not every man had such a friend, and few women such a lover. And a vague foreboding warned him that the life-long comradeship would never be renewed. At last he turned to go back to the house, and met a maid tripping over the turf with a note. "From Mr. Rickman, sir," she said. He opened it with a pre-occupied air and read:

"The infant Annesley died this morning. G. R."

He was now the actual heir of Gledesworth. The present owner was incapable of making a will.

"Poor little fellow!" he exclaimed; "poor baby! poor young mother!"

Then he went in to convey the weighty tidings to Mrs. Annesley.

Edward was now on his way home with a heavy weight on his heart, thinking that the two best things in his life, his love and his friendship, had been broken at one blow.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

It was a dark day in May, one of those weird, poetic days, full of purple shadows broken by bursts of hazy sun-gold, in which the most lovely and capricious of months hides its youth and freshness under a gloom borrowed from autumn as if in sport.

Mysterious folds of gloom were woven about the downs; great masses of purple and umber shade floated solemnly over the level lands below them; the hills on the horizon borrowed an adventitious grandeur from these broad cloud-shadows, and from the dark haze swathed about their flanks; the level band of sea, where the hills suddenly broke away from the shore, was dark, dream-like and lighted by fitful gleams of gold; here and there, when a rift in the heavy clouds let the sunshine through in a long, misty shaft, an unexpected field, cottage or village tower shone out from the surrounding haze, only to fade into the warm gloom again with a most magical effect; the dense dark woods, which looked autumnal in the shadow, smiled now and again under the sun-bursts into the exquisitely varied tints of fresh May foliage.

On such a day nightingales sing in the stillness of the shadowy woods, and now and then blackbirds interrupt them with their flute-notes, while larks keep fluttering upwards with sudden torrents of song. On such a day the cuckoo is less persistent in his merry defiance, and doves moan continually in fragrant fir-woods.

The square and solid tower of Arden church looked darker and grander beneath the deep cloud-piled sky, a solemn shadow brooded over the thatched roofs and stone walls of the cottages, over the grey gables of Arden Manor, and the dark-tiled Parsonage roof. From the church-tower there hung in rarely-stirred folds a flag, half-mast high; one or two were shown in the

village; the throb of the slow-pulsed knell vibrated upon the quiet air. Raysh Squire was once more exercising his melancholy function in the chill darkness of the belfry, whither even on the brightest summer days a wandering sunbeam rarely strayed, and then only in slender, half-dimmed rods. Raysh yawned; he had been pulling his rope for a good hour, and, in spite of his firm conviction that only such art as he had acquired in a life-long exercise of his craft could do justice to a funeral knell, and that such art did not reside in any mortal arm within ten miles of Arden, he sorely wanted to see and hear all that was going on outside in the thronged churchyard, and continually asked for information of the little grandchild he had stationed at the door, which stood slightly ajar for the purpose.

"Baint 'em come yet?" he kept repeating, with impatience; and the little one always said, "No; only the live ones is come."

A low murmur of voices rose from the village and hummed under the very walls of the church; the landlord of the Golden Horse moved about with a sort of melancholy exultation irradiating his wooden visage, and gave up counting the maze of vehicles drawn up under the sycamore-trees before his door in an agreeable despair; while his wife and daughter flew hither and thither with crimson faces and panting chests, in the vain attempt to be in five places at once and the still vainer endeavour to discriminate between the numerous orders heaped upon them, until the landlady became "that harled," as she expressed it, that she relieved her feelings by dealing a sounding box on the ear to the astounded and unoffending stable-help, thus completely scattering what remained of his harried wits; after that she felt better, though it cost her a solid, silver shilling.

The whole of Arden village, gentle and simple, every one who was not too old or too ill, was about the churchyard or along the road; extreme youth was no bar to coming out, since it could be carried in arms, whence it occasionally expressed loud dissatisfaction at the lot of man, not knowing how soon it would be quieted once and for all in the silence whence it came. Everybody wore a bit of black ribbon or crape, and every face expressed that quiet enjoyment which the British lower classes experience only at a funeral.

"Where there's one death in a family there's sure to be three avore the year's out," one kind-faced matron observed to another with unction.

"Zure enough," replied the other in an awed voice, "but taint every day there's such a sad death as this yere. My master, he

zes there's trouble for everybody holding Gledesworth lands, and there ain't no going agen it no more than Scripture. Bide still, Billy, my dear; don't ee pull sister's hair now."

The national temperament, seen pure and unadulterated only in the lower classes, delights chiefly in the dismal; it may be that the countrymen of Shakspeare and Milton have a natural bias for tragedy; it may be that strong and deep natures can only be moved by strong and deep things, such as the dark mysteries of death and sorrow. At all events the light and bright things that set other Europeans laughing and dancing, too frequently move our sober folk only to a sort of wondering contempt.

Presently a dark procession was seen winding slowly between the cottage flower-gardens; the vicar, a solitary and conspicuous figure in his white surplice, issued from the deep-arched door and walked slowly down to the lych-gate, to meet the solemn and silent guest with words of immortal hope; a touching custom, which seems like the welcome home of a son, never more to leave the fatherly roof.

Then the occupants of the carts and carriages emptied and drawn up before the Golden Horse, arranged themselves in fit order with those who had followed the hearse over the downs all the way from distant Gledesworth, and the silent and unconscious centre of all the lugubrious pomp was lifted on to the broad shoulders of eight stalwart labourers, in white smocks, blue Sunday trousers and broad felt hats, and borne silently after the welcoming priest into the dim church, which was already half-full of women in black (for the men were nearly all following), and where the air was tremulous with the wail of the Funeral March from the organ.

There were no breaking hearts and streaming eyes at this burial; those who had loved the man lying beneath the violet velvet pall were gone to their long home, and he who walked as chief mourner behind him, Paul Annesley, had never known him. But there were tears in Paul Annesley's eyes; his face was pale with feeling and his heart ached within him with pity for the man he had never seen, who for ten weary years had been a captive, strange to all the joys of life, dead to all its interests and affections, exchanging no rational word with his fellow-men, and seeing the face of none who loved him. Yet though it was well that the darkness of death should close upon this terrible affliction, the pity of it struck keen to the heart of the man who inherited the possessions which had been so valueless to their owner, and the fact that all the lands they had traversed that morning, the very land out of which that small field reserved for God and the poorest

of men was taken, belonged to him, made that darkened and silenced life seem the more pitiful to the heir, standing above the coffin in the flower of his youth.

Paul had been discontented with his lot, and now one higher than he had ever dreamed of was his. He was in some sort the lord of all that following of tenantry who packed the church aisles and thronged the churchyard in silent homage to the poor dead maniac. His sudden good-fortune touched his heart to the core, made it ache with compassion for his unknown kinsman, and pierced it with a sense of his own defects. Dr. Davis, his former successful rival, stood not far off, having come uninvited out of respect to the dead man, or rather to his position. Their relative positions were indeed changed, and Paul was ashamed of his former jealousy. Gervase Rickman was there as steward to the estate; the broad-faced, hearty-voiced farmers who yesterday might employ him or not as they chose, were to-day his tenants; their manner to him had changed already. He was still actually the parish doctor; only two nights ago he rode over the bleak downs to help Daniel Pink's wife in her trouble, Daniel Pink, who, though not on the home farm, represented his father, now too feeble for the service, as a bearer.

There was little air in the dim, massive church, where the heavy arches rested on low, solid piers of immense girth; it was obstructed by old-fashioned square pews; the light came dimly through the deep, small-paned windows, many of which, stained richly, broke the white daylight in various colours over the stone effigies of former Annesleys, couched there with lance and helm in perpetual prayer. The musty odour of the unsunned church was stifling; the monotonous voice of the clergyman fell sadly upon the ear, echoed by Raysh Squire's still more monotonous church falsetto, complaining of the brevity of man's stay upon earth and its sadness; these things, and the strangeness of the thoughts which came upon him as he stood in a position to which he was not born, and which was yet his by birth, so wrought on Paul that he could scarcely remain there, and was glad when the rite in the church was done, and they came out into the free air again, and the buzz of low voices died away before them.

A sun-burst fell upon the violet pall; it lighted the white smocks of the bearers, the weathered stonework of the church, the delicate green of the elms where rooks were cawing, and glorified the faces of the crowd. Paul wondered how his turn of fortune would work on Alice? It would be nothing without her, and though he now contrasted his position with Edward's triumphantly, he would gladly have exchanged with him, or sunk

back into the struggling and unsuccessful parish doctor, if he could but win Alice.

People looked with wondering interest at the pale face, so familiar to most of them under such different associations, for the most part with harmless envy of one on whom Fortune had so suddenly smiled, otherwise not without a vague pity. There were whispers of the mysterious doom which clung to the owner of Gledesworth, and speculations as to this man's fate. Would he too go down to the grave, unmourned by a son of his blood, not knowing who should gather the riches he left behind him?

Many, nay most of the tenants remembered Reginald Annesley before his great affliction had sundered him from his fellow-men, some of them remembered old kindnesses and genial words, all were touched with an awed pity, which was the deeper because they did not know that no blind Fate, but youthful excess, developing a hereditary tendency, was the true cause of his long affliction. Especially was this the feeling of the simple-hearted men who bore their master and friend to his tomb. To them his solitary following of one unknown kinsman was all the more striking because of the large retinue which surrounded him; they thought of the sad life of which this was the close, and their hearts went out in strong pity; they listened to Job's lament over the sorrow and brevity of man's life, mingled with the terrible cry that was wrung from Notker's awestruck heart a thousand years ago, when the falling of a bridge crushed so many strong lives out before his eyes, with a deep sense of the pathos of human destiny. Daniel Pink, the shepherd, looked up and caught the intense glance of Paul's eyes, and pitied him too, he knew not why.

Daniel Pink did not envy any man; if he had been offered any other lot than his own, he would probably have refused it. For he had all that man needs, the warm affections of a home that his own strong arms maintained, and a plain path of daily duty marked out before him; he walked upon an earth full of meaning and beauty, and looked up to an infinite heaven of majesty and wonder. His heart was touched with pity both for the rich man they were laying in his tomb, his father's master, and for the young heir who stood living before him.

Only when the last words of prayer and blessing were said, the last rites done, and they turned away from the vault, the reality of his changed fortune came home to Paul, and with it a new sense of human responsibility, and especially his own. Yearnings for a better life came to him on the brink of that dark vault; he resolved to be worthy of the gifts suddenly

heaped upon him. How mean his past life seemed in the light of these new aspirations!

So he thought as he left the churchyard leading on his arm the widow of young Reginald Annesley, and the mother of the dead baby, who, like himself, had never seen the elder Reginald. One of his first duties would be to make her a liberal provision; for, owing to unforeseen circumstances and the reversal of natural order in the untimely deaths of her husband and child, scarcely anything had fallen to her share. There was even a pathos in the fact that this dead man had carefully entailed his estates, but vainly, since his issue failed and his lands passed immediately to an unknown heir-at-law.

Mrs. Walter Annesley was in the church, veiled in crape, with a handkerchief to her eyes, yet by no means consumed with grief. She had indeed one cause of sorrow in the fact that Paul's inheritance had fallen to him so early that he had not time to appreciate the sacrifice she made to pay his debts. She was thinking of the new lord of Gledesworth, and wishing that Alice, who was sitting unseen at the organ, would meditate on the same theme.

"Let us fly from this dismal place, Alice," cried Sibyl in the afternoon; "of all the humbugs in this humbugging world, funerals are the greatest and most dismal. I will not have any fuss made about me when I am dead, remember that. I am so glad Paul is turned into a little prince. I never realized it till to-day. I suppose he will be too grand to come to the Manor now?"

"Do you want to get rid of him, Sibyl?"

"I? Oh! my dear, he does not come to see *me*," replied Sibyl with an air of raillery apparently lost on Alice, who was busy arranging Hubert's collar so as to leash him. But Sibyl was not easily extinguished, and when they had gone a little way through the fields she returned to the charge.

"I am sure that he was not happy, Alice," she said with a mysterious air; "there was a secret canker at the root of everything, and I believe it was want of money."

"If you are alluding to Daniel Pink," replied Alice with a little smile, "he is the most contented fellow I know, and though his large family does make him poor——"

"Alice, how provoking you are! Pink indeed!"

As they were setting forth expressly to visit Pink's wife and welcome the ninth baby, Alice explained that it was most natural to be thinking of him.

"As if people could think of anybody but the new little king," replied Sibyl; "I feel quite set up myself. Do look round, Alice, and realize that all this belongs to Paul Annesley, this very turf we are walking on and our own dear Arden Manor down there by the church. I suppose he could turn us out if he chose, we are a kind of vassals. I almost wish he would, Arden is so very dull; don't you?"

"You are growing restless again. Is this philosophic?" asked Alice, placing the basket she was carrying to the shepherd's wife on the ground and resting her arms on a gate halfway up the down.

"No; it's human. Yes, I am restless. I want—oh I want—*everything!*" cried Sibyl.

Alice took the bright face in her hands, and kissed it. "You are a little fool, Sibbie," she said gently, "a dear little fool. Write some more verses, it always does you good. I am not sure that a good whipping would not be the best thing."

"No doubt," replied Sibyl, while she lifted her head and gazed on the solemn fields and hills over which the great cloud-shadows were slowly sailing in larger and larger masses, thus leaving rarer intervals of sun-light, as if she were looking in vain for happiness. "Do you think, Alice, it will be always like this? Quiet Arden, Raysh ringing the bells, the garden, the dairy, a day's shopping in Medington, an occasional visitor, Mrs. Pink's annual baby, the choir-practice, and Horace Merton coming home from Oxford and worrying the vicar?"

Alice looked thoughtfully at Sibyl's pretty wistful face and wondered "who he was?" Surely not young Merton himself, the vicar's troublesome prodigal, whom she had seen that morning, the only uninterested person during the funeral, at full length in a hammock under the vicarage trees, studying French literature in yellow paper covers, in obedience to his father's request that he should "read a little" during his enforced absence from Oxford; an absence connected with the unauthorized introduction of a monkey to the apartments of a Don, as poor Mr. Merton understood. This young gentleman haunted the Manor with the persistence of an ancestral ghost, and was not without his good points, in spite of the monkey incident; yet though Sibyl diligently snubbed him, as she did all her victims as soon as the nature of their malady became apparent, no one could say when and in whose person the fated man might appear.

"Perhaps there will be a change for us," Alice said; "Mrs. Pink may not go on having babies for ever, and Horace Merton will not be sent down more than once again. And some day Raysh will be ringing the bells for your wedding."

"What a trivial notion! Can't you originate something a little less common-place?"

"Well! for mine then. I am sure that is a new idea. Then you would get rid of me."

"I don't know," replied Sibyl, "I don't think you would go very far."

"Dear Sibbie, you are more sibylline than usual. I can't see the point of the innuendo, unless you mean me to elope with Raysh," said Alice, pursuing her way tranquilly with the basket in her hand.

"I do think you are stone-blind," continued Sibyl, in a graver tone. "My dear, don't you know what everybody else knows or has known for the last few weeks, that that poor fellow's happiness hangs upon your breath?"

Alice grew hot, and made a movement of impatience; then she asked Sibyl to speak plainly and leave the subject.

"He is really such a good fellow, and it would make us all so happy to have you near, and you would make him so happy. And his mother wishes it, she even asked me to try to bring it on."

"Oh!" returned Alice, with a sigh of relief, "in strict confidence, I suppose, Miss Sib. A pretty conspirator she chose when she lighted upon you. You sweet goose, if you must needs amuse yourself with match-making, you could not hit upon a worse plan than to show your hand."

"But Alice, do be serious——"

"Dear child, I am serious, and I wish you to understand once for all that it is a mistake, and to help me spare him the pain of a direct refusal. I saw it all months ago, and have done my best to put a stop to it. I even thought of going away for a time."

"It is in your power to make him so happy," said Sibyl pathetically. "You might grow to care for him in time, you know."

"Never," she answered. "I could never—in any case—have cared for a man of that uncontrolled disposition—even supposing——"

"Supposing what?" Sibyl asked with a keen look.

"Oh! nothing. I mean, even if I loved him, I could never be happy with such a man. I am like my mother. I saw her misery, Sibyl, child as I was. There was that in my poor father which made her feel him her inferior—it is not for me to speak of his faults. If I once found what I could not respect in a man, I could not live with him. I have a sort of pride——"

"But, Alice," interrupted Sibyl quickly, "if you cannot respect Paul Annesley, whom then can you respect?"

"Oh, I beg his pardon," replied Alice, her breath taken away by this sudden indignation; "I spoke widely. Of course I respect our old and true friend Paul. But a husband—that is different—it is something stronger and deeper than respect, it is reverence that a husband compels."

"And what can you not reverence in Dr. Annesley?" asked Sibyl with such remorseless persistence, that Alice began to wonder if Paul Annesley could be the name of him who had troubled her friend's peace of mind.

"He is at the mercy of his own impulses," she said.

"And they are always good," pursued Sibyl vindictively.

"You say a bold thing, when you say that of any human being, Sibyl. No, I can only give my deepest reverence to the man who is master of himself. 'Give me the man that is not passion's slave.' I can value this one as a friend, but—no nearer. No one knows what is in Paul Annesley; any turn of fate may bring him into a totally opposite direction; he might do anything. I tell you in the very strictest confidence what I would tell no other human being, I tremble for him now; he will never be the same again, now that his circumstances are so changed, and what he will be, Heaven alone knows. As you say, he has good impulses, but what are they without a guiding principle and a compelling will?"

"And you alone can give his life a right direction," urged Sibyl. "Oh, Alice! think what it is to hold this man's fate in your hands!"

"And what if I hold another——" She stopped short and coloured. "Dear Sibyl, you are indeed a staunch friend," she added in a gentler voice. "If he could win you now—a heart is so easily caught at the rebound."

"There will be no rebound," replied Sibyl, in so even a voice that Alice was sure of the Platonic nature of her regard for Paul. "The kind of malady you inspire, you dear creature, is incurable. People soon get over the slight shocks I administer, but you are fatal."

Alice smiled tenderly upon Sibyl, but made no rejoinder, and they walked on noiselessly over the rich turf, deep in thought. Sibyl's regard for Alice had, as the other well knew, something of worship; her ardent nature invested her friendships with a romantic enthusiasm that sometimes made her calmer friend smile and often called forth a gentle rebuke from her. Perhaps Alice's affection for the younger and more impetuous girl was as strong as Sibyl's, though it expressed itself less passionately, and had a strong dash of maternal compassion. Nothing had ever

come between them since they had first met, two shy stranger girls of thirteen in the porch of Arden Manor, and instantly lost their shyness in the fellow-feeling it engendered between them.

The first bar was to come that day. It happened in Daniel Pink's solitary thatched cottage, which was built in a nest-like hollow under the down. The girls entered the low porch, like the welcome guests they were, and sat in the dim smoke-blackened room, handling and discussing the ninth little Pink by turns, while the shepherd looked on with a pleased face, with the deposed baby in his arms and two chubby children a little older clinging to his knees.

"Look at the heft of 'n," said the proud father, "entirely drags ye down, Miss Sibyl, 'e do."

"I wouldn't carry him a mile for a fortune," Sibyl replied, kissing the little red fist, "not for all the lands of Gledesworth, Shepherd."

"I 'lows you wouldn't, Miss. Dr. Annesley have took a heavy weight on the shoulders of 'n. A many have been bowed down by riches, a many, as I've a yerd zay."

"And many have been crushed by poverty," Alice said.

"Zure enough. 'Taint fur we to zay what's good for us, Miss Alice. A personable man, but a doesn't come up to the Captain, the doctor doesn't."

"The Captain?" asked Alice, wondering.

"Oh! he is only a lieutenant. You mean Lieutenant Annesley, don't you, Master Pink?" said the ready Sibyl.

"When I zeen he and you walking together, Miss Lingard," continued the shepherd gravely, "I zes to mezelf, I zes, 'Marriages is made in Heaven,' I zes. And Mam Gale, she zays——"

"Oh! Master Pink, you won't forget about the seedlings, will you?" cried Alice, starting up. "It is getting so late. We have stayed too long."

And with hasty farewells Alice left the cottage, forgetting the basket and leaving Sibyl to follow more leisurely. She walked so fast that she had reached the gate at the end of the field through which the cottage was approached before Sibyl had left the garden, and waited for her there, with flushed cheeks. Sibyl's ready tongue was unaccountably tied when she joined her; a strange pain was gnawing at her heart, and Alice's attempts at commonplace chat did not succeed.

"I can't help thinking that this same Mr. Edward Annesley might just as well write to us, Alice," she said at last. "That little note to mother the day after he left was the briefest formality."

"Perhaps," replied Alice, who had now regained her self-possession, "he thinks the same of us. You can scold him when he comes."

"But will he come?" asked Sibyl, with such eagerness that Alice stopped on her way and looked with sudden misgiving into Sibyl's dark ardent eyes and read all.

"Sibyl," she said, "oh! Sibyl!" and she tried to draw her nearer; but Sibyl pushed her back with a look Alice had never seen before, and walked on in silence.

In the first bitter flood of jealous agony that surged into her heart Sibyl felt capable of hating her friend; then the mortifying memory of her self-deception made her so hot with self-contempt that every other feeling was swallowed up in it, and she longed for the earth to open and hide her away for ever. It seemed as if she had better never have been born than make so dreadful a blunder at the very threshold of life; she thought she could never endure to live any more. Then things came back to her memory, little insignificant details which had passed unobserved at the time, but which now showed the general meaning of the whole story, just as the festal lights reveal the general outlines of a building, and she saw clearly how things stood between Edward and Alice. How could it have been otherwise? She felt the charm of Alice too deeply herself to wonder that she should have been preferred. It was inevitable that those two should choose each other. But for her everything had come to a full stop. "Entbehren sollst du," was the message the woods and fields and sea had for her that day; it was written in the deep cloud-piled sky, and in the solemn shadows about the hills; the rooks, sailing home in stately chanting procession, reminded her of it, and the blackbirds, fluting mournfully down in the copses, repeated it; even the lark, fluttering upwards with the beginning of a song, and dropping back into silence, had the same meaning in his music.

She paused and allowed Alice to come up with her, and seeing that she had been crying, kissed her with a sort of passion.

"Do you remember the day you first came to Arden, Alice?" she said, "when I found you crying in your room after we were sent to bed?"

"And you comforted me, and we agreed always to be friends."

"And now my crossness has made you cry, you poor dear! And you are dearer to me than anybody in the whole universe."

"Sibyl!"

"And there is Gervase out by the ricks wondering why we are so late. Let us make haste home."

Then Gervase caught sight of them and came to meet them,

scolding them both with fraternal impartiality for being so late. He had lately taken to living in rooms at Medington to save time in going and coming from business, and now expected to be treated as a guest in his frequent visits to Arden.

He looked at Sibyl and saw that something was wrong; and Alice looked at the brother and sister with a sort of remorse. In spite of Gervase's well-acted brotherliness, she was not sure that she had not driven him from his home, and now she had done something worse to his sister; all this was a poor requital to the family in which she had been received, a lonely child. The question now arose, how should she set these wrongs right? How could she stand alone against the iron strength of Fate?

This helplessness completely crushed her spirits; she slipped away to the solitude of her own room under the pretext of fatigue, and sat musing long at the open lattice.

Gervase in the meantime had taken his violin, and, leaning against the great apple-tree, whence the blossom was now almost gone, drew his bow across the strings so that they made an almost human cry, a sound that never failed to bring Sibyl to his side, and she came out and sat in the seat beneath him, while he played on in silence strains so mournful and so tender that they drew the over-charge of feeling from her heart and the refreshing tears to her eyes, till the "Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren," which the lark and the breezes sang to her in the afternoon, seemed the sweetest refrain in the world.

While he played, a series of pictures rose before Gervase's mind, pictures in which he saw himself baffling by continual thrusts the fate which to Alice seemed so invincible, until he had bound Edward to his sister, and Alice to himself.

Alice heard the music from her window, and it drew tears from her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY.

It is beautiful to be on the line of rail which runs along the Jura; the mountain rises sheer on one side and the steep falls suddenly away on the other, while the traveller is borne with birdlike swiftness and directness along the hillside, secure, without effort, straight to an apparent block which hinders further progress. But a closer view shows a black spot in the rocky mass, tiny as the nest of some sea-bird on a cliff; it grows as the distance lessens, till it becomes a dark arch, and into that darts the train with angry thunder and impatient panting, and there is blackness all round, and thick air, and a vague distress of body and mind for awhile. Then a pale light gleams and a sweet rush of air follows, and out like a bird darts the long train, as if suspended in mid-air by the mountain-side, till another tiny bird-hole appears, and growing, swallows up the darting length of the train, which is soon cast forth once more on the open face of the steep cliff. All this is pleasant in itself, but still more pleasant to one who, like Edward Annesley, is impatient of the journey's length and anxious to reach its end.

He bestowed various inward maledictions upon Continental railways as he journeyed on, and wondered how such a blessing as steam came to be bestowed upon a people so inappreciative of the speed to be got out of it. But the swiftest English express would have been slow in comparison with the winged desires which bore his heart onwards to the goal of Alice Lingard's presence. The three months' embargo was now taken off and Paul was not yet engaged to Alice; Edward was therefore free to prosecute his own suit.

The frontier was cleared, the interminable delay of the customs officers at an end, and the long sweep of the waters of Neufchâtel shone greyly along the low shores in the dim, misty morning. And is this the glory of Alpine lakeland? this long, grey river between the low, grey shores? Where are the mountains? where the pearly gleam of the far-off snow-peaks, shaming the less ethereal lustre of the white cloud-masses? where the blue

shadows in the mountain-flanks, the distant hint of glacier and crevasse, the purple folds of the wooded spurs lower down? There is nothing but a pall of grey sky brooding heavily over a sheet of cold, grey water, ruffled slightly by the September breeze; the sedges and reeds about the banks rustle mournfully; a bird's wild and desolate cry is heard; no boats glide over the lonely lake; the train creeps on, and Edward feels the inward chill of disappointment that reality too often brings to long brooded hopes.

The train stopped to the accompaniment of cries of "Granson;" he got out and strolled through the narrow street to a broad-eaved house with a low portal opening on the pavement, and was soon standing in its cool, flagged hall, clasped in the arms of a gold-haired girl, and the centre of admiring and sympathetic glances from other fair-haired girls who were flitting up and down the uncarpeted staircase and sighing for the day when fathers and brothers should come to fetch them away to their foreign homes.

"I say, Nell," he remonstrated, after a resigned kiss, "if this kind of thing could only be done with some attempt at privacy."

"I daresay," sobbed Eleanor, "when I have not spoken English for months or seen anybody from home for a year. Wait till you get *Heimweh*, you hard-hearted thing!"

"Well! pack up your traps and let us be off to Neufchâtel by the next train," he said, following his sister into the august presence of the school-mistress, from whom he had much difficulty in wresting the required permission. Then, after being introduced to five of Miss Eleanor's very best friends, and dining in a very feminine and attenuated manner with the whole sisterhood, he bore her off at last in triumph by the afternoon train.

And then a miracle happened. By this time the streets were flooded with the warm gold of autumn sunshine, and the lake waters sparkled with sapphire reflections, and lo! the heavy pall of grey had been swept away by unseen hands, and behind it, spreading away into infinite dim distances, gleaming beneath clear sky, lay range upon range of white, blue-shadowed Alps, their pure summits springing high, one above the other, into the very depths of the pale blue ether overhead. There they lay, terrible in their snowy grandeur, dreamlike in their marvellous beauty, tinted with the delicate transparency of some airy unsubstantial pageant, and yet so real and so impressive in their massive reality. Such a repose they had in their naked sublimity, lying reclined like strong gods at rest, girdling about the lake and lowlands and holding the earth still in their mighty grasp.

"So Neufchâtel is tame?" Eleanor asked, watching her brother's face of rapt admiration with pleased delight.

"There is enchantment in it! Are there witches hereabouts, Nell?" he replied.

"Only Sibyl Rickman, who passes for something of the kind. So nothing came of your flirtation, Ned?"

"Which one?" he replied tranquilly. "One a week is the average you girls impute to me."

"Oh! we heard all about it. Harriet wrote me some long letters from Aunt Eleanor's this summer. Auntie told her all about Sibyl——"

"I hope Miss Rickman boxed the imp's ears well."

"The Rickmans were pleased, Auntie said, especially Gervase."

"Stuff! I say, Nell, tell me what those peaks are called?"

"Of course you have heard about Paul and Alice Lingard?"

"Heard what?" he asked abruptly, facing about with a defiant gaze.

"It's not given out yet, I believe," replied Eleanor tranquilly, not unwilling to tantalize her brother now that she had succeeded in interesting him, "but of course, as Harriet says (for fifteen, I must say, Harrie is very observant), nobody with half an eye can doubt what is going to happen. Paul was like her shadow the whole time, and when a girl accepts presents from a man——"

"Do you mean to say," Edward asked with slow and distinct utterance, "that Paul is engaged to Miss Lingard?"

"Didn't I say it is not given out? But Auntie already makes plans for herself, and decides not to live at Gledesworth, with Alice. Not that they don't get on well, for Alice is like a daughter to her, Harrie says. Everybody thinks it a great lift for Miss Alice. I never much admired her myself. I believe she has an awful temper. You saw her, of course?"

"Of course. I was there in the spring," he replied absently, and turned his face away to study the splendid vision of the far-spreading mountains before him. Stern and awful those couched giants looked now, lying so still in their snowy beauty; the pitiless purity of the lonely ice peaks struck chill to his very soul. Why had he come? Would it not be better now, after escorting Eleanor on her way to join her aunt, just to leave her and go back? It was too great an advantage for Paul to be near Alice all those months; what else could have been expected? Naturally he would die out of her memory, however strong the impression made in those few blissful days at Arden might have been. It was hard and bitter, but the only thing was to face it like a man. Yes, he would go in and join the party as before proposed, and see Alice once more—there was no fear that he should trouble her peace, appearing thus at the

eleventh hour. All the circumstances, which at the time had seemed so strong in confirming the hope that she returned his feelings—airy inessential things, as they were, tones, glances, the turn of a head, the quiver of a lip, the faltering of an even step—faded into nothingness now; probably she had never even guessed at his own devotion; so much the better.

"So that is the Jungfrau," he said at last, in response to Eleanor's long catalogue of summits and ranges. "No? Oh! you mean that? Yes. Very fine. Yes." There were tears in his eyes when his sister looked at him, and his face was quite pale; which signs she set down to emotion at the first glimpse of Alpine splendour.

"When was Harrie at Medington?" he asked suddenly.

"Just now. She left in time for Auntie to start. She was awfully sorry to go; she wanted to see things come to a crisis. I am to watch progress and describe the *dénoûment*."

"Are you? Well! don't begin match-making yet awhile, for pity's sake. When were postage-stamps invented? What was Nero's leading virtue? Upon what principle were Greek armies raised? Who first used hair-pins, and why? I hope you know something besides how to chatter French, Miss, since your education is finished."

It was growing dusk when they reached Neufchâtel. The lights were beginning to twinkle out in the streets and to double themselves in the clear and waveless lake, and, as they gradually drew nearer to the hotel whither they were bound, the memories of the few days Edward had passed with Alice became more imperative; he especially felt the power of those moments during which they had strolled alone together to the little inn upon the downs, and it seemed to him that what had then passed between them, unspoken though it was, could never be erased from either life, whatever spell Paul's passionate wooing might since then have cast upon her. The first glance in her face, when they met, would tell him all, he thought, and his pulse quickened, and a subtle warmth quivered all through him, as he saw to the piling of his sister's luggage on the omnibus, while the moments fled which were to bring him face to face with Alice.

"Let us walk on, Nellie," he said at last, rebelling against the slowness with which the loading of the omnibus went on, and he led her along the streets at a pace which took her breath away, downhill though the path was, and did not stop till they found themselves in the broad hall of the hotel, enquiring for Mrs. Annesley's apartments.

When they went up there were two ladies in the shadowy

unlighted room; one was Mrs. Annesley, who rose with her accustomed stateliness and folded Eleanor in her arms with a welcoming kiss, and then received Edward more coldly, and formally thanked him for escorting his sister from school, intimating that Paul could have done it equally well, and politely conveying to him the impression, which was but too correct, that he had much better have remained in England.

"But, my dear aunt," he replied, revolting against this cool reception, "I had intended from the very first to be one of the Swiss party, if you remember. We arranged it all in the spring, and I only delayed joining you because my leave could not conveniently begin before."

"We have heard so little of you since the spring, Edward," she replied icily, "that it was not unnatural to suppose you had thought better of your intention."

These words he felt were a prophecy of what Alice must have been saying in her heart, if indeed she had ever given him a thought, and he turned to the other lady, from addressing whom a strong shyness had held him, and who, though she had risen, yet remained in the deep shadow of a recess by the window; looking her for the first time full in the face, he met the dark sweet gaze of Sibyl, whereupon his own eyes fell and his shyness with it, and he shook hands with her with a cordial greeting and unembarrassed smile.

"Do say you are glad to see me, Miss Rickman," he said; "my aunt has so cruelly crushed me that I require some comfort from somebody."

"I am glad to see you, though surprised, pleasantly surprised," she replied with loyal simplicity, and as she spoke Edward suddenly and unaccountably began to think of Viola, when she held that memorable conversation with the Duke, "I am all the daughters of my father's house, and yet I know not——"

What connection could there be between Viola and Sibyl? yet ever after he could not think of Viola unless associated with Sibyl.

"And I know somebody else will be pleasantly surprised to see you," she added, with a gentle smile, and then his heart began to beat again, and he listened for the beloved name. "Perhaps you do not know," she added guilelessly, "what a liking Gervase has for you."

"Gervase! oh, Gervase!" he echoed, disenchanted; "So your brother is here? That is all right. He was afraid, I remember, he would not be able to leave his business."

"Gervase always contrives to get his way somehow, business or no business," she replied. "But here he is to speak for himself."

Gervase came in and received him with the greatest cordiality, though he too expressed surprise at his appearance. "Your telegram to Paul gave us all a pleasing shock," he said. "Paul turned quite pale with pleasure," he added, laughing, and unconsumed by the fiery glance which Mrs. Annesley's blue eyes darted at him.

"And where *is* Paul?" asked Edward, whose eyes kept turning expectantly to the door, and whom some unaccountable feeling held from enquiring for the one object of his solicitude.

"Ah! where is Annesley, by the way?" echoed Gervase, turning to the ladies with an indifferent air.

"I think," replied Mrs. Annesley, "that they went on the lake together, dear children! It is getting late for them."

"Who are *they?*" Edward asked, with unaccustomed roughness.

"Do not ask too many questions, you tiresome fellow, never call attention to these things. I must leave you now," she replied. "Come, Nellie, child, you will scarcely be ready in time for dinner;" and Mrs. Annesley swept from the room like some majestic frigate of old days, with her niece in her train as a little gunboat; while Sibyl followed at some distance, with a look towards Edward which he was too angry to perceive, but which meant, "I should like to tell you all about it and relieve you from causeless fears."

"Look here, Rickman," cried Edward, turning round and facing him with a glance so flaming that Gervase was obliged to meet it. "Tell me the truth, will you? Is Paul engaged to Miss Lingard or not?"

"No—" was the word surprised from him by this unexpected assault? "Ah! that is—I mean—— You heard what your aunt said, 'These things are better not talked about.' To call attention to them often spoils them. Things, you see, are just now in a most delicate stage. There is no doubt whatever about the issue of it; but the engagement is not yet announced, that's all. You've dropped upon us at an awkward moment, you see, and your aunt is not overcome with rapture at the sight of you—an outsider makes a certain disturbance—precipitates matters. I fancy they would like to prolong the present undecided state—to proclaim the engagement would draw attention to themselves, which, of course, is a frightful bore."

"Then the sooner the engagement is proclaimed the better," cried Edward, grimly. "My aunt should be more careful of a young lady committed to her charge. I should never permit anything of the kind in the case of my sisters."

"Nor should I, Annesley, to be quite frank," returned Rickman, becoming suddenly confidential. "I have but one sister, but I should be extremely sorry for the man who ventured to pay marked attentions to her without coming to the point—very sorry for him," he added, with a grim pleasantry that was lost upon his hearer. "But, you see, Miss Lingard is not your sister or mine either, and Mrs. Annesley is not under our charge, and Switzerland ranks next to our own beloved and befogged island as a free country. Have you found your room yet? I hear it is next to mine, and has a splendid outlook over the lake."

Edward followed him, vexed at his momentary loss of self-control, and after taking possession of his apartment and finding there were some moments to be filled yet before the hour of *table d'hôte*, strolled out by the waterside with Rickman.

The glorious autumn sunset had silently consumed itself, the rich colours were all calmed down into a tender primrose glow in the west, and the pensive twilight was dreaming with ever-deepening intensity upon the bosom of the clear dark waters. Lights from the town looked, half-ashamed of their own insignificance, into the pure lake-depths, one or two pale stars gazed steadfastly into the deep heart of the waters, boats glided silent and ghost-like over the still surface, voices came softened through the quieting evening, the noises of the town blended murmuringly, the majestic peace of the mountains brooded over all. The tumult in Edward's warm young heart quieted beneath these sweet calm influences, some feeling of the nothingness of human emotion in the presence of the Infinite came upon him, and he felt that he could meet Alice and part with her with becoming calm, even cheerfulness, and clasp Paul's hand with brotherly warmth in congratulating him. "Dear old Paul! Heaven bless him!" he said within himself, as he watched a boat containing two figures glide noiselessly towards the tiny quay in the hotel grounds.

An attendant caught the painter and moored the dim bark to the landing; the oarsman leapt to land, and turning, handed a second figure, a woman's, out of the boat. Then the two walked arm-in-arm with slow lingering steps towards the terrace-wall, over which Edward and Gervase were leaning, and passed along beneath them. There is a certain manner of walking, a kind of pensive pausing upon every step as if to linger out the pleasure of it, with a certain inclination of the taller head to that beneath it, accompanied by a low and liquid intonation of the voice, which Edward had always been pleased to consider as proper to lovers,

and lovers only, and such, he assured himself, these two people undoubtedly were.

The lingering step bore them just before and beneath the wall on which he leant, and a shaft of hot and piercing pain shot through his breast, as in the nearest face he recognized Paul's, transfigured by feeling, and knew that the figure at his side must be that of Alice. There was no need for Rickman to draw him aside with an observation to the effect that they had better not disturb the *tête-à-tête*. He shrank at once into the shadow and let them pass well out of sight, and then returned silently to the lighted hotel.

"Well! I don't think any one can spoil sport after that, Annesley," Rickman said lightly, with a quick gaze in Edward's face, which was composed but rather grim. "Now is Sibyl's time, if she only knew it," he thought; "his heart is soft with pain and ready for fresh impressions." And, although people were already going in to dinner, he found time to whisper to Sibyl to take pity on the new arrival and make him as welcome as possible, because the rest of the party were inclined to leave him out in the cold, and by his arrangement Edward's chair was placed next Sibyl's.

The soup was removed by the time Paul entered. He did not shake hands with Edward, his seat being on the opposite side of the table, but merely nodded a welcome to him, hoped he had not found it too hot in the train, and addressed some cousinly and affectionate words to Eleanor, who stood a little in awe of her exalted kinsman. Mrs. Annesley was in her most seraphic mood and said pleasant things to everybody. Sibyl tried to obey her brother's behest with regard to Edward, who was quite ready to respond to her gentle advances. The little party was most pleasant and friendly. But every time the door opened, there was a simultaneous, though almost imperceptible movement of Edward's head, and a subsequent look of disappointment on his face; the food he swallowed might have been ink, for all he knew or cared; the course was removed, and still Alice did not appear, and no one seemed disturbed about it.

"But where is Miss Lingard?" he asked at last.

"Dear Alice is a little upset. She was out rather too long, I think," Mrs. Annesley replied, with an air of mystery; "she will be quite restored to-morrow, no doubt."

Then Sibyl explained to him that Alice had over-tired herself in a mountain excursion which she had recently made with some friends who were staying at a village a few miles away, along the lake shore. Further, that Mrs. Annesley had intended to

drive to meet her, but had been prevented, and that Paul had gone instead, but in a boat; that he had lost an oar and thus been delayed. The end of the history was, Alice was so completely knocked up that, but for Paul's arm, she could not have walked from the boat to the hotel.

"I didn't go up the mountains myself for the sunrise," she added, "because I was not feeling equal to such a tiring walk; but Alice is always perfectly well, and people never expect her to be over-tired. It was a good thing Mr. Annesley was with her, because he knew exactly how to treat her when she fainted."

"Did he, indeed?" replied Edward. And over a succession of pipes he pondered much that night upon the sunrise excursion.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE BALCONY.

It was not till the next afternoon, when they were at coffee, sitting under the plane-trees by the water, that Edward met Alice; and by that time he had so schooled himself into accepting Paul's superior claim upon her that he was able to command a perfectly tranquil and friendly manner towards her.

Paul and Gervase had been closeted together all the morning, on affairs which seemed to have urgency. Mrs. Annesley had at times been admitted to the conference, and had otherwise pursued the extensive and interesting correspondence for which she was celebrated. Edward and Sibyl had taken the eager school-girl, who was half-intoxicated by her recent final deliverance from thraldom, to see such lions as Neufchâtel afforded.

But all these occupations had now come to an end, and the whole party were assembled beneath the sun-steeped plane-tops, with the clear, massive jewel of the deep blue lake before them, when Alice issued from the hotel and joined them.

It was a change upon Paul's face at her coming, that arrested Edward's attention, and caused him to look round and catch sight of the figure in white moving slowly towards them. She was pale, but not otherwise altered from when he last saw her, save that the look which had remained before him ever since he parted with her in the street at Medington was gone, and gone, as he feared, for ever.

"I was so sorry to be unable to see you, last night," she said with a tranquil smile, and a slight pained quiver of the lip, which he did not understand; and she took the hand he offered as coldly as he gave it, while they both thought of the warm pressure of a few months since.

He replied by some expression of regret for her illness, and handing her his own chair, placed another for himself near it, unconscious of the strong interest with which the meeting was being watched. Paul had closed his mouth fiercely and firmly, while the breath came strong and quick through his nostrils and his hands clenched themselves. Gervase gave one of his side-long

glances, and placing one hand in his pocket, broke a pencil into fragments with his fingers. Mrs. Annesley looked on the pair with head erect, and a peculiar smile that her son knew, but in this instance did not notice. Sibyl regarded them with a tender yearning gaze. It is wonderful to think of the storm and tumult of varying passions that was stirred in these different hearts by the simple incident of two people meeting and exchanging commonplace observations in renewal of an acquaintance of a few days formed a few months since. Eleanor alone considered the incident too trivial for observation, and continued chatting to her aunt about their pleasant morning ramble, and the delicious ices Edward gave them.

When the pair sat down, and Alice addressed some remark to Mrs. Annesley in deprecation of the latter's displeasure at her leaving her room, the pressure on all those hearts relaxed; Paul's stormy face calmed, Gervase regretted the destruction of his pencil, Mrs. Annesley wore her most engaging smile, but Sibyl's sweet face had a disappointed look.

"I felt so perfectly rested, I was obliged to get up, Mrs. Annesley, in spite of the doctor's orders," Alice said.

"You will repent, Alice, and Annesley will enjoy a savage triumph over your certain relapse, which you deserve for taking no notice of me," said Gervase, handing her some coffee.

"There are two Mr. Annesleys now, and we have not even the distinction of doctor to help us, since Paul has become so grand," said Sibyl innocently.

"I only wish I had my promotion to help you to the distinction of Captain, Miss Sibyl," replied Edward; "as it is, Paul is *the* Annesley—the head of the clan."

"And if Paul dies, Ned will be *the* Annesley," Eleanor added cheerfully.

"I am sorry I can't oblige you just yet, Nellie," said Paul, pinching her cheek, while his mother frowned. Edward laughed, and said he would quite as soon have a live cousin as a landed estate, which Gervase considered as a polite inversion of fact.

"And why did you knock yourself up in this cruel manner, Miss Lingard?" Edward asked.

Alice replied that it was very usual for people to overtire themselves on mountain excursions,—a small price to pay for the delight of seeing the sun rise upon the Alps; that she had been unlucky in getting no rest in the little hut in which she had passed the night, and still more so in being unable to get proper food. "And to crown all," she added, "I had to come home in an uncomfortable boat instead of a luxurious carriage."

"And Paul lost an oar, too?" asked Edward.

"Yes, but that was my fault," she replied, colouring. "I must needs go and faint instead of steering, and Mr. Annesley's hands were over-full."

Paul coloured even more than Alice at the mention of this incident, and made no observation. Edward was indignant with him for having taken the weary girl alone in a boat, an indignation that Paul echoed inwardly, though he half justified himself by the consideration that it was his last chance and a desperate one.

"I should have thought a doctor ought to have known better," Edward said with some heat.

Alice regretted now that she had not given up the Swiss tour, as she had wished to do when Paul's intentions were made manifest to her just before they started. But he had begged her with such persistence, and had so pledged himself to refrain from re-opening a question she thought finally settled, and there were so many other reasons, chiefly concerning Sibyl, whose wounded heart she had hoped to heal both by the change and enjoyment thus afforded and by the clear understanding she would gain of Edward's views, that she had yielded.

And now Edward was there, but he had forgotten all that occurred at Arden, while Sibyl—she feared that Sibyl remembered too much. Else she had misread the lustre in Sibyl's eyes and the peculiar exaltation in her face when she bent over her for a good-night kiss the evening before.

For some time after Edward Annesley's visit to Arden in April, the postman's well-known step had brought an unacknowledged tremor to the hearts of both girls, whenever he passed before the window to the kitchen-door, where there was always a welcoming word and a cup of drink for him. As day after day went by, and no new and unknown handwriting appeared on the letters delivered, an increasing sense of disappointment, which she neither owned nor analysed, took the lustre out of the sunshine and the beauty from the waxing summer for Alice, while Sibyl grew impatient and half-indignant, she scarcely knew why. Once, a few days after his departure, Mrs. Rickman received a letter from Edward, which she read out for the public benefit, a formal little epistle thanking her for his brief and pleasant visit, and containing conventional greetings to the family. Gradually the postman's step evoked a slighter tremor in the girls' hearts, and the keenness of the vague daily discontent wore off; the impending tour was discussed without reference to Edward, and Alice felt that whatever power she

might have had over his thoughts was now gone. All those signs and tokens of deeper meaning in his words and looks, were doubtless misconstructions of her own. He had been charmed only for a moment, and superficially; she had never touched his heart, and he had now forgotten the passing fancy. Or he might have been charmed to the extent of perceiving danger, and for that very reason have decided, like the sensible man he seemed to be, not to follow up an acquaintance that might lead him into undesirable paths. While she reasoned thus, Alice's cheek lost a little of its youthful bloom and her manner acquired a certain listlessness; she blamed herself for having been so ready to misconstrue the passing interest of a stranger, and decided that it was highly unbecoming to allow him any place in her thoughts, hoping that Sibyl had the strength to make the same decision.

In the meantime Paul's attentions, though delicate and unobtrusive, had been unremitting; he had told his mother of his heart's desire and enlisted her on his side; thus Mrs. Annesley's powerful influence had been brought to bear upon Alice, who always had a certain tenderness for the stately, solitary woman, with her external coldness and inward passion, whose very weaknesses appealed to the younger woman's generous and calmer nature.

The intelligence that Edward was to join them at Neufchâtel, as his sister's escort, did not reach Alice, who was absent at the time it came, till the day of her return with Paul from the mountain excursion, an occasion which he had made for himself and utilized for a formal proposal of marriage. It was then that the oar had been lost, and that, in a final passionate appeal for mercy, he had betrayed his consuming jealousy of Edward, and spoken of the latter's expected arrival. Their solitary situation in the boat together, the vehemence of the fiery-hearted man and the passion with which he urged his suit, frightened the tired girl, and had, as Paul well knew, as much to do with the fainting fit as the mountain climbing; and now, as Alice sat under the plane-trees with the cousins, knowing what was in Paul's heart, and seeing Edward serenely polite and indifferent, she began to ponder some excuse for leaving the party.

There had been little communication between the cousins since their altercation in the garden at Medington; Edward had written to congratulate Paul upon his altered circumstances when he inherited the Gledesworth estates, and Paul had replied with cold formality, informing him that in the event of his dying unmarried, the landed property (which was not entail'ed) was to

pass to him, as it would in case he left no will. Edward thanked him for his kindly intention, expressing the hope that circumstances would render it of no effect, and nothing more passed between them.

A letter Edward wrote to Mrs. Annesley was unanswered, a circumstance that made little impression upon him. Paul had told his mother of what occurred between himself and Edward in the garden that spring afternoon, and at the same time had spoken of his wishes concerning Alice, and Mrs. Annesley, though obliged to acknowledge that Edward had borne himself honourably in a trying position, had taken sides against him as Paul's rival and enemy, and her former liking for her nephew had turned to a dislike commensurate with the intensity of her nature.

But Edward, though he could not help seeing that his arrival was unwelcome to his aunt, had no suspicion of all this; he expected to be petted as usual, not dreaming that Paul would have spoken of the false position in which they found themselves, or of the compact they had made respecting it. Neither did he think that his presence was now unwelcome to Paul, since the latter had, as he thought, won his point. He was thus unconscious of being a cause of offence to any one and perfectly tranquil at heart, having subdued the rebellious feelings of disappointed love, and did his best that afternoon to be pleasant and sociable, in spite of Paul's grimness and his aunt's chilling majesty. Gervase, too, was in a genial mood, and Sibyl was unusually animated, and took up her former bantering tone towards Edward, who liked it.

In the evening the young people went for a starlight row on the lake, intending to linger about for the rising of the moon; Paul excused himself on the plea of letter-writing, and Alice on the ground of her recent fatigue. They were stepping into the boat, when Edward made a false step in the dark, and he fell full length into the water between the boat and the quay, and had to go back to change his clothes, leaving the other three, to Gervase's chagrin, to go for their row alone.

Thus it happened that when he was fit to be seen again he strolled out on the gallery, and so encountered Alice, whom Mrs. Annesley, unsuspiciously nodding over a newspaper in her sitting-room, supposed to have gone to bed. When they saw each other the two young hearts began to beat with sympathetic vehemence, and at first each was inclined to avoid the other and beat a retreat, an inclination conquered by the better feeling of each—some pride in Alice, which rebelled against acknowledging

her weakness, a loyal determination on Edward's part to accept the situation and let no weak emotion conquer him. He therefore approached the chair she occupied, and, half-seating himself on the gallery rail with his back against a pillar, began in an unembarrassed strain to explain his return from the boat, and to continue a conversation they had carried on at coffee about various homely topics connected with Arden, the health of Raysh Squire, the grey mare, the dairy and so forth.

"I wonder that you remember these trifles, Mr. Annesley," Alice said; "though, indeed, they are the chief interests of our lives."

"There are things one cannot forget," he replied, safe in his conviction that there was no more hope or fear with regard to her heart; "certainly not such sunny memories as I have of my little visit to Arden. Not," he added rather inconsequently, "that I expect Arden people to remember it."

"I think Arden people's memories were not unpleasant," she replied.

"But you had forgotten about my part in the tour," he urged, with a slight tincture of reproach. "You were surprised to see me."

"We thought *you* had forgotten," she answered, "or that you had changed your mind—that it was but a passing intention—a 'one of these fine days' affair, as Mr. Rickman says," and Edward's heart leapt up at this admission that she had thought and speculated so much upon it.

"You see I had not forgotten," he replied with gentle reproach; "I intended it from the first, and have been building on it all the summer."

"Yes," she replied with a neutral accent, and a faint sigh, which might have been fatigue. Her eyes were turned from him, she gazed pensively across the wide lake, lying dark beneath the stars, and upon the dim mountain masses, spectral in the uncertain light, with her cheek resting wearily on her hand. Edward looked down upon the quiet face, which was lighted up by the lamp within the room, with kindling eyes and a swift hot stir of uncomprehended emotion. She did not seem happy, as a newly affianced bride should; his heart yearned strongly over her, and his breath came quick. He could not speak, nor could she; the silence deepened about them and folded them round as if in a close embrace; it grew so intense, that each thought the other must hear sounding through it the heart-beats which told the too rapid minutes. For a moment he felt his self-control going in the stress of that silent communion, felt that he must speak out,

ırid lay his heart's devotion, vain as it was, at her feet; a quiver vent through him, he grasped the balcony rail with a fiercer ;rip; he had already unclosed his lips to speak, when Alice, ınder the pressure of his unseen but ardent glance, averted her ıead, and so shaded it with her hand that he could no longer ee her features; she thus overset the delicate poise of feeling; ıad she turned to meet his glance, as she dared not, it would all ıave been different, the currents of many lives would have been liverted. He mastered the impulse with an effort; loyalty to 'aul, the chivalry which shrank from giving her needless pain, a ort of deference to his own manhood, all sprang up in answer to he turn of her head, and helped him to subdue himself, and ıreak the sweet and passionate silence with calm and measured vords.

"No wonder that others forget," he said; "three months is a long time to keep a commonplace conversation in one's head."

"Yes; three months is a long time," Alice replied, not dreaming that she had changed the current of their lives by that slight movement of the head, and not thinking on what airy and infinitesimal trifles fates are balanced; "and so many things have happened this summer. Your cousin has become since then another person, or rather personage."

"He has indeed! Lucky fellow! This will be a fateful summer in his memory."

"Then we have lost Gervase," continued Alice tranquilly. "And since the election, when he came out so strongly as a political speaker, he has become more and more immersed in politics, and is beginning quite a fresh career."

"Rickman is a clever fellow," said Edward, glad that the tension of feeling was relaxed.

"No one suspects the power that is in him; we shall hear more of Gervase some day. When once he is in Parliament, he will make a stir. He is the kind of man who makes revolutions, or arrests them at the critical moment."

"How fortunate he is in having a friend who thinks so highly of him!" returned Edward, jealously angry at this prophecy.

"Not more highly than he deserves, as you will see if you live long enough. Few people know him as well as I do. I am his sister, and yet a stranger. I have all the intimate knowledge of a sister, and none of the natural bias. Sibyl is too like him to appraise him properly."

"Miss Rickman strikes me as the greater genius of the two," said Edward, "and she is so charming."

"Isn't she?" replied Alice, flushing up with enthusiasm, and

meeting his now softened gaze fully, while she launched out into an affectionate panegyric of her friend. "I am so glad that you like her," she said at last, "and I am sure that the more you know her the better you will like her."

The moon had now risen above the silent hill-peaks, it was shedding its mystic glory over the calm bosom of the waters, and touching Alice's radiant uplifted face, whence all trace of self-remembrance had fled, with a more ethereal beauty. The influences of the hour were potent, the danger signals throbbed in Edward's breast; once more he clutched the gallery rail fiercely, and thought of the loyalty he owed to Paul.

"You are a friend worth having," he said at length, subduing himself to a cold and even utterance; "some day, perhaps—" here the romantic influences threatened to overwhelm him again, and he paused to recover himself—"you may enter me—if I prove myself in any way worthy, that is—upon the list of friends—that is—I hope you may."

Alice quivered slightly, moved by the glowing incoherence of his words, then she summoned all her pride to resist the rising tenderness and hope within her, and looked him directly in the face, where she saw nothing but serene friendliness, and wondered a little.

"Surely you may if you like," she replied with frank indifference; and Edward, yielding to a stronger impulse, took her hand and pressed it too warmly, so that Alice coloured, and withdrew it with gentle firmness, then Edward, who was just going to make some allusion to the connection about to be formed, as he supposed, between them, started violently, and stood upright, gazing at something behind her. Alice turned then, and saw, quivering with jealousy, and white with anger, the face of Paul.

Neither of the three spoke for a few minutes; the two on the balcony gazed as if thunderstruck at Paul's blazing eyes and defiant features, to which the bluish-white moonlight imparted an unearthly tint. Long afterwards they remembered that silent gaze, and heard, in memory, the strains which now in reality touched their ears, as the notes of Gervase's violin floated uncertainly over the water, melancholy, passionate and pleading.

"I am delighted to find you well enough to be still sitting up," said Paul at last, in a cold hard voice; to which Alice replied that she was now quite recovered from her fatigue, and intended to wait up for the boating party's return. Edward then observed that it was extremely pleasant on the gallery, and that he was not sorry to have missed the row on the lake.

"I suppose not," returned Paul icily; "there are few things

more charming than to be on a balcony in the moonlight with congenial society."

"And charming music," added Alice, with a faint tinge of defiance; "either Gervase is excelling himself, or the water and the distance combine to make his playing unusually good to-night."

"And the listener's mood doubtless," continued Paul, with a smile that was like the flash of a steel blade.

The wild notes of the violin came nearer and nearer; Paul's passionate glance was riveted on Edward's face, which looked unusually handsome in its almost stern composure under the moon-rays, the beauty of the face maddened him; in the hot jealousy which consumed his heart he hated Edward with a strong hatred that almost surpassed the passion of his love for Alice; for one wild moment he was impelled to spring upon him, and hurl him backwards into the depths below.

Instead of which he returned to the sitting-room, where Mrs. Annesley, aroused from her evening doze by the three voices at the window, was now alert and observant, and began to chide Alice gently for sitting up so late, while her mind was severely exercised to account for the presence of the other two.

CHAPTER IV.

UNSPOKEN THOUGHTS.

On the day following that memorable evening, Mrs. Annesley's party had decided to make an excursion into the Jura mountains, where Gervase assured Alice she would find some new and delightful subjects for her sketch-book. He had but a brief time to spare for holiday-making, and not being very good at real mountain climbing, made a great point of their going into those green solitudes while he was still with them, thus leaving them to take the snow mountains after his departure. Alice, who was now quite at her ease with him, having assured herself that he had completely subdued his passing fancy for her, was loth to disappoint him, else she would have found an excuse for returning to England and thus saved herself and Paul the embarrassment of frequent meetings.

Mrs. Annesley, too, sought a pretext for breaking up the party, the harmony of which had been so fatally marred by her nephew's appearance; she feared that a crisis had been reached during Paul's row with Alice on the afternoon of Edward's arrival, but had no certain knowledge to act upon; she reflected, however, that Edward could as easily see Alice at home as upon this excursion, if he were minded to see her, and therefore came to the conclusion that things had better take their course. Edward went, partly for the pleasure of being with Alice, and partly because he was too proud to accept the part of a disappointed suitor, and wished to cultivate friendly relations with Paul and his affianced wife. But he wondered that the engagement was not made public, and decided to put the question point-blank to Paul, considering that he had a right to know how matters stood.

Paul, however, held him at arm's length, and there was no opportunity of coming to an explanation before they started upon that ill-fated tour. Paul had taken a fancy to have some old family jewels reset for his mother in Switzerland in remembrance of this his first lengthy excursion with her, and was busy that morning in getting them from the jeweller's. When Mrs.

Annesley saw them, she was so dismayed at the idea of travelling about with gems of such value in her possession, that she begged him to take them back to the jeweller, and let him keep them until their return to England.

He was a little vexed that she would not wear the brooch and ear-rings, at least in the evenings, and fought against her declaration that she would imperil neither her maid's life nor her own by carrying such valuables about; but at last, in the presence of the whole party, who had been admiring the ornaments, consented to take them back, and tossed the morocco case carelessly into his breast-pocket.

"I believe it is all superstition," he said; "you take the Annesley jewels for the Nibelungen Hoard. You forget that the family curse is attached to the land alone."

Then he went out into the town for the purpose, as every one supposed, of placing the packet in safety at the jeweller's. When he returned to the hotel he fell in with Gervase, who was sitting under the plane-trees by the waterside, studying some papers intently, and making rapid notes upon them.

Paul looked so earnestly upon his thoughtful face, before he withdrew in the intention of not disturbing him, that Rickman, who could see things with his eyes shut, and perceived that Paul wished to disburden his mind of something, threw his papers aside in pure charity, saying that he had finished making his notes.

"What a fellow you are," Paul said admiringly; "even in your holiday-time you get through half-a-dozen men's work!"

"I am no drone," replied Gervase, "but I like a little play too."

"Look here, Rickman," continued Paul, "you are very keen at detecting motives. Do you know why Edward Annesley joined us?"

"Yes," replied Gervase calmly, "he came to pay his addresses to Miss Lingard. He made up his mind to do so at Arden."

"Why then did he not communicate with her all this time?" he continued in his impetuous way.

"Did he not communicate with her?" replied Gervase innocently; "why should you suppose that?"

The suggestion was as sparks to tinder in Paul's jealous heart. Why, indeed, should he suppose that? He leapt at once to the conclusion that Edward had written. "He was on the balcony alone with her last night," he added, in such tragic accents as befitted one making an accusation of mortal sin.

"Was he? I thought that accident singularly opportune,"

returned Gervase, as if struck by a new idea. "On the gallery in the moonlight—ah! One can see that your cousin means business."

"Yet they never met till the spring. They know so little of each other," said Paul, looking gloomily at the sparkling water over which boats were flitting rapidly in the sunshine.

"These things are soon done. Besides the very fact of their knowing so little of each other heightens the romance of the situation," continued Gervase, furtively studying Paul's tortured face from under his eyelashes, and then looking with an interested air at a vessel discharging its cargo a little distance off. "Boy and girl affairs seldom come to anything. The way to prevent two young people taking a fancy to each other is to throw them constantly together under the most prosaic circumstances, and let them get a thorough knowledge of each other's weaknesses. No man is a hero to his valet. Do you remember old Robinson, who used to live——"

"Oh, I know that story!" Paul interrupted impatiently. "You are a keen observer, Rickman, and when, may I ask, did you first observe that Edward, as you say, meant business, and what do you suppose are his chances of success?"

"I confess that I keep my eyes open in going through the world, Annesley. And I think your cousin has about as good a chance of success as anybody ever had. It's rather a pity. She ought to make a better match. Besides that, I doubt if he cares for her—I think I know whom he would have chosen but for golden reasons on the other side. Though, to be sure, these military men flirt right and left without the smallest regard to consequences."

"We thought Sibyl was the attraction——"

"So she was," replied Gervase abruptly. And he moved away, compressing his lips with annoyance, and calling Paul's attention to a quaintly rigged vessel passing by.

Paul at once fell in with his humour and changed the subject. He saw that Edward's suit was as distasteful to Gervase as to himself, though for different reasons. Gervase evidently thought that Sibyl had been trifled with, and in spite of what had passed between himself and his cousin in their interview in his garden at Medington, he began to wonder if the latter had indeed preferred Sibyl until he discovered the slenderness of her dower. It was improbable, but there is no improbability at which jealousy will not grasp.

Just then, as they were strolling back to the house, they fell in with Edward, who was going in the same direction with his sister.

Paul looked on his cousin's handsome face, and heard his light-hearted laughter at some passing jest, and a deadly feeling took possession of him; the bright young face drew him with an intense fascination; he saw in its gaiety an evidence of triumph, an easy triumph which scarcely stirred a sense of endeavour; its beauty maddened him, a hot passion surged uncontrollably within him, the passion of a bitter hatred.

Just as Alice's mere presence had been wont to thrill him, Edward's thrilled him now; he could not be in the same room with either of them without an intense consciousness of their existence, without marking the slightest movement or most casual word of each, following every syllable and gesture of the one with passionate love, and of the other with an equally passionate hate.

All through the luncheon they took before setting out for the Jura, he watched them both with burning glances, equally attracted by both, his imagination lending intense meaning to the few casual remarks they exchanged, and supplying words to the silences which fell upon the unconscious objects of his thoughts, neither of whom were in tune with the cheerful holiday air assumed or felt by the rest of the party.

Once Alice looked up and arrested one of Paul's fiery looks. A shade of vexation crossed her face, and she bit her lips as she turned her head and addressed some remark to Mrs. Annesley.

In the railway carriage there was a general tendency to consult books and newspapers, and Mrs. Annesley composed herself in an attitude of dignified repose. By some chance or mischance, Paul found himself in the inner corner of the carriage with Eleanor, while Edward was at the other end by the open door, sitting next to Alice, and immediately opposite Mrs. Annesley. From behind his unread newspaper the jealous man continued to watch the objects of his different passions, brooding upon the pain which tore him inwardly until it reached a terrible pitch.

He recalled the day of Edward's arrival at Medington, and wished that day had never dawned. He remembered his own expansion of heart and the unusual confidences he had made to his cousin concerning his domestic misery, his poverty and his purposed marriage. How changed his life was since that day, what strange and unexpected good fortune had befallen him! and yet what would he not have given to be once more as he was then, the struggling, unsuccessful parish doctor, harassed with domestic troubles and money cares, but possessing the one golden hope of one day winning Alice! On that day he had heard of the first in the chain of deaths by which he had become a man of wealth and standing.

Death, he mused, is a thing upon which no one can reckon; framers of statistics may draw up imposing columns of figures, they may tell you to a nicety the percentage of deaths at this age and that, in this condition and that, from this cause and that; and yet when you leave the abstract of masses and come to the concrete of individual cases, all these calculations fail; Death is restored to his proper shape, as the most capricious as well as most terrible of tyrants, striking at random, missing where his shaft is apparently aimed, and sending his dart home in unexpected quarters. Had it been otherwise, had it been he instead of Reginald Annesley who was struck down in the flower of youth, it had been far better, he would have had rest from this bitter torment. Or why not Edward? Edward who, as a soldier, was equally liable with Reginald to be sent to savage places, and indulge in savage sports. His heart leapt at the thought of Edward's death; he was certain that but for his appearance at Arden he would have won Alice. He began thinking of the possibilities which still existed. They had been talking at luncheon of some recent difficult mountain ascents. Edward had waxed enthusiastic, and spoken about guides and ropes, and calculated what time he should have after the Jura excursion for attempting some of the yet unscaled summits; and Mrs. Annesley had talked in Cassandra strain of the fatalities which marked the conquest of peak after peak, trying to cool his ardour. If he would but carry out his intention, a slight momentary giddiness, a flaw in a rope, an instant's failure of nerve, the loosening of a stone, one false step on the part of one of the travellers, not to mention the thousand chances and changes of weather, or the many possibilities of losing the way or mistaking the ever-changing landmarks—what a difference this might make!

Unconscious of these terrible thoughts, Edward sat silent by Alice, reading his English paper, and taking a melancholy pleasure in being at least near her, while she perused her book with an undercurrent memory of the romantic moments passed on the balcony the night before.

Presently the newspaper was laid aside; Edward folded his arms and gazed downwards in silent thought. His glance rested on the folds of Alice's dress, which swept his feet. He was thinking, as Paul surmised, of her, picturing her at Gledesworth, the head of a great household, moving through the long suites of stately rooms with a gentle grace, courted by the local notables, honoured by those beneath her, cheering and blessing the sorrowful and the poor; charming all. He saw her at the head of Paul's table; he saw them surrounded with guests great and small; he

saw them alone with intimate friends—himself, he hoped, amongst them—by the winter hearth, or beneath the great elms and mighty oaks of their lovely demesne in the summer sunlight. She was made for a life full of leisure and dignity, he wondered that he could ever have dreamed of asking her to share his lowlier lot—how well she would fill every place her wealth and station would assign her, whether charming great people in brilliant assemblies or dispensing kindness in poor cottages !—everywhere she must be loved and honoured, especially by him, and would she perhaps have a kind place in her heart for Paul's cousin and friend? Would the shadow of his aunt's fiery nature fall across her home? Would her children—he saw them clinging about her, large-eyed, round-faced—would they inherit the only authentic family curse? Or would the wholesome sweetness of her nature prevail over the fiercer strain? He stirred uneasily; something slipped from Alice's pocket to the ground as she took out her handkerchief. He picked up her purse, and restored it with a laughing comment on her carelessness, and Paul thought they lingered over the exchange so that their hands might touch; but it was not so—the purse was given and taken too daintily for that.

"Why did we not bring some fruit?" sighed Sibyl, petulantly. "I *am* so thirsty this hot afternoon!"

"I will get you some at the next halt," Edward replied, and, despite a warning from Gervase that there was no time, he sprang out the moment the train stopped, and made for the *buffet*, leaving his friends to speculate on the extreme improbability of his return before they moved on.

The blue-bloused porters leisurely removed a trunk or two; the guard shut the doors with a nonchalant air, and made observations with the aid of his fingers and shoulders to a friend; the time went on; the engine panted impatiently. It suddenly occurred to the guard that it was getting late; he exchanged one last remark with his friend, laughing, gave the signal to start with a pre-occupied air, and the train steamed slowly out of the little station, followed by a parting jest from the *chef de gare*, who lounged, wide-trousered and majestic, across the platform; and then only did Edward return from his foraging expedition, and dash madly after the moving train with the intention of boarding it.

"Hi! holà!" cried the indignant *chef de gare*, roused to a slight interest in railway matters by this glaring infraction of rules. But Edward dashed over the rails, upsetting a porter, who feebly attempted to detain him, and, gaining the foot-board, made for his own carriage, followed by official execrations on the English and all their mad ways. In the meantime the speed had increased,

they were approaching a tunnel, the door stuck, and, on opening with a burst at last, detached Edward from his foothold, so that he fell, clutching at the rail with one hand, and hanging thus for one dreadful moment, during which Paul endured a life-time of emotion. His terrible wish was being fulfilled before his eyes; he saw the man he hated actually hurled off to destruction, and turned sick with horror. He was too far off to help him, but he moved down towards the door in the instinctive attempt to save him, scarcely knowing what he did, and in the meantime, Gervase, reaching over Alice, had caught Edward by the collar, and dragged him in before he had time even to know that Alice's hands were attempting the same kind office with Gervase's.

"Thank you, Rickman," Edward said, composedly taking his seat. "I am afraid I stepped on your dress, Miss Lingard. Nothing but these mulberries to be had, Miss Rickman."

"The next time you commit suicide, Edward," said Mrs. Annesley, severely, "have the goodness not to do it in my presence."

"Or mine, you tiresome, good-for-nothing fellow!" sobbed Eleanor. "I wish you had been killed—it would have served you right, that it would!"

"Sorry to have frightened you, my dear aunt. It was the door sticking that upset me. But it was not far to fall," he apologized. "Nell, if you make such an idiot of yourself—I'll, I don't know what I won't do to you."

Paul was very thankful when he saw his cousin hauled in scathless. In those few moments of peril he had some inkling of what it might be to have a fellow-creature's death upon one's conscience. Then he looked at Alice, and saw that she was very pale, and made no contribution to the conversation. At that sight the fierce tide of hate surged back into his heart, and he wished that Edward were lying dead in the dark tunnel through which they had glided immediately on his rescue.

Edward, too, observed Alice's pallor, and reproached himself for having given her a shock by his fool-hardiness. The thought came to him like balm, that if he had been killed there and then she might have shed a kindly tear over him. She had a heart full of pity, he knew; he remembered her trouble about the consumptive Reuben Gale, and bethought him to ask her if they had given his plan of entering the army any further consideration.

"That would never have done," Alice replied. "But I am quite happy about Reuben now. Your cousin has procured him a situation with Mrs. Reginald Annesley, who is to winter in Algeria. Reuben will be with her there."

"Of course," he thought within himself, "Paul does everything for her now. She wants no other friend. But the day may come—Well, I am a fool! but I will at least enjoy these few days with her!"

It was very pleasant, in spite of the bitter of Paul's success. The stations passed too quickly by; the great white peaks were left behind, the country became greener and greener, the vineyards had vanished, great solemn pine-woods brooded darkly upon the hill slopes, the farmsteads and villages had steeper roofs and straighter outlines; tillage became scarcer, the cowbells tinkled musically in the distance, the tunnels were fewer, and the country more thinly populated; they were in the heart of the Jura, and the journey was coming to an end with its sweet companionship. Edward would have liked to travel on thus by Alice's side, silent himself, but within sound of her voice, between the green mountain-walls, by the rushing streams and shadowy pine-woods, for ever and ever. Perhaps they might never travel thus side by side again. Perhaps it would be better so. The enchantment was too strong; it ought to be broken. He had his life to live, and its duties to fulfil. Some day, no doubt, he would find a wife for himself—and here some vague thought of Sibyl flitted through his brain—and all the usual home-ties; but it would not do to go on dreaming over what was now another's right. One day more, only one, and then, having heard decidedly from Paul's own lips what their relations really were, he would congratulate them and withdraw from the perilous fascination till time had hardened him against it.

Paul, too, was purposing to withdraw after one day more, one day in which in despair he would try a last appeal—not to Alice this time, but to Edward. All that was manly, and all that was in the best sense gentle in him rose up against his own behaviour, in remaining with Alice after what had passed in the boat; but something stronger than the instincts of a gentleman held him, to his own shame and inward contempt.

The bitter-sweet journey came to an end at last. The train slackened and drew up by a little wayside station above a bleak steep-roofed village. Edward stepped out into the sunshine of the golden evening and handed Alice down. Mrs. Annesley drew in her skirts, and waited till the others were out and her maid had arrived for orders; and then, the luggage having been claimed, they wound slowly down through the echoing empty street, to the vast barrack of a hotel, which seemed to Edward's troubled imagination to claim previous acquaintance with him, though he could never have seen it unless in dreams.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE PINES SANG.

THE tall pine-trees stood dreaming in the balmy quiet of the autumn afternoon; the ruddy gold sunbeams, brooding upon the vast green roof, found an entrance here and there, and shot through many a tiny aperture in long tremulous shafts of powdery light, which blunted themselves here and there against the solid red trunks of the pines, kindling them into dull fire with their touch; they shattered themselves into scales of paler light elsewhere among the dark boughs, and descended softly, their colour fined away into a dim grey memory of former splendour, upon the thick noiseless carpet of fir-needles, where few things grew but occasional straggling brambles with more leaves than fruit.

The low deep murmur which is never wholly hushed in a pine-wood, even at the stillest seasons, rose fitfully in soft swells of plaintive remonstrance or half-chiding caress, and died away into a silence broken again by some fuller tone of deeper meaning, hinting vaguely of epic grandeur, the unrevealed glory of which moaned itself gradually into a yet more mystic stillness, only to wake again and again, and cast an unspeakably soothing charm upon the solitary rambler among those grand and gloomy aisles.

Yet the afternoon was so calm that no breath appeared to wake that exquisite wind-music. The lofty pines stood motionless, the blue-green mass of their meeting tops showing dark and still against the pale, tranquil heaven, and, when the eye caught them sideways on the slope, dark and still against the green mountain-side on which they lay like a mantle. A subtle stimulating fragrance floated through those shadowy aisles; the distant melody of cow-bells from the breezy pastures came half-hushed to lose itself in the dim stillness; the pigeons' half-querulous, half-contented murmur, the cracking of a twig, the rustle of some shy animal among the leaves occasionally ruffled the surface of the august silence which spreads like a deep calm lake through such wood-land solitudes.

Alice passed slowly along beneath the vast vibrating roof, awed and refreshed by the deep calm, her heart awake to the lightest

beating of the mighty pulses of Nature, as hearts are when strongly touched, wondering what the faint fairy music of the pine-tops meant, now swayed as if by the far-off passion of some boding sorrow, now stirred by the mystic beauty of some unutterable joy. Is there any sympathy between the great heart of Nature, whence we all draw our being, and the throbbing human lives into which the vague music of its voices is poured? Did the pine melody mourn or exult over her, or rather give out some strong tones of comfort and healing? Many things those aged trees had seen while standing there in tempest and sunshine—children frolicking beneath them; merry parties of holiday-makers passing through in noon-day stillness and moonlit calm; lovers doubtless, generations of them, strolling there apart from the village folk below; tragedies, perhaps, dark deeds never divulged to the eye or ear of man. Did the echoes and memories of these things start up and entangle themselves in the intricate mazes which formed the living roof above her? As she strolled on, the shadows broke and the trunks lessened in the growing light, till the last colonnade stood dark against the blue sky. Was that the rush of water stealing gently on the ear? There, beyond where the wood ended, as she knew, the green river ran down from its mountain bed, deep and swift, between precipitous cliffs of rock, the river Doubs, dividing Switzerland from France.

The rest of the party had gone to spend the day at the Saut du Doubs in the mountain height above, passing along through the wood and by the cliff-walled river. Alice, still tired from her last mountain climb, had remained in the village to bear Mrs. Annesley company, and had now left her quiet with her desk and books, to meet the others on their homeward way.

She had set out full early, and therefore loitered, not wishing to walk too far. It was the last time, she reflected with pleasure, that she should meet Paul. He had, on arriving at Bourget the night before, announced that he had but one more day to spend in Switzerland, because affairs required his return home. It pained her that he had shown so little consideration and good taste as to remain with them after what had passed in the boat, when she gave him that distinct and final refusal, and he, in his anger, charged her with loving his cousin, a charge met by an indignant silence which confirmed his suspicions. His conduct in thus taking her by surprise, and almost obliging her to go in the boat alone with him, had distressed her beyond measure; she could never again feel the old warm friendship for him; he had fallen too deeply. She saw that his passion overpowered him, and swept on beyond his control over everything, bearing him helpless as a

child on its flood. That was his great fault; it neutralized all his virtues, and earned her contemptuous pity. She was glad that he had at least come to his senses to the extent of seeing that he ought now to leave her; she was glad that his mother did not know what had passed, and she lavished unusual tenderness upon her that day, to make up for the closer affection she could never give her a right to claim, a tenderness which misled Mrs. Annesley, who did not think that Paul's quiet and matter-of-fact announcement of his intended return to England could result from a disappointment, but conjectured it to mean rather success, and to mark a considerate wish to spare Alice the public announcement of their engagement.

Strong in her own perfect self-mastery, Alice, who was young and had not learnt to bear pitifully with human weakness, felt little tenderness for Paul's. Self-control, she mused, as she strolled in the majestic peace of the forest stillness, is one of the most essential qualities in character; no virtue is of any avail without it; the world belongs, as Gervase so frequently observed and illustrated by his example, to the man who knows how to keep still when the house is on fire.

Gervase had resigned her like a gentleman, in spite of those masterful words of his on Arden down, words which still rang in the ears of her memory from time to time; why could not Paul?

He had much, he might surely do without the love of one poor girl. Many a woman would be proud to accept him; many a woman loved these passion-swayed natures, and found a way to control them; he might let her go in peace.

A pigeon fluttered out above her head; she heard its pinions clatter as it darted away into the peaceful sunlight above the river; she thought she heard confused voices and a cry, and listened intently. Was it the gipsy party returning, or was it the wail of a plover? She could distinguish nothing but the tinkle of a cow-bell fitfully wandering, and far off the faint echo of a peasant's song.

How beautiful the world is, and what a divine peace there is in Nature! she mused, feeling, young though she was, a little weary with the passions of men, and longing with the universal longing of the human heart for "something afar from the sphere of our sorrow," yet always hoping to find it there in that very sphere. A mighty peace fell from the calm heaven through the dim murmuring aisles into her heart, and refreshed it, like the manna which descended unseen in the midnight silence of old, and refreshed the hungering wanderers in the desert. She was in one of those rare and exalted moods in which our mortality fa ls from

us like a cast-off robe; when the present suffices, the past no longer burdens us and the future casts no shadows upon us, but the soul breathes freely in the quiet. No troublous influence touched her, nothing jarred the sweet calm; she did not dream that the balmy air of that still place was yet vibrating with the strong conflict of a soul in agony, overmastered by a jealousy and hatred of which she was the innocent cause. Nature stands so serenely aloof from the passions of men, that nothing human can sully her proud purity: she neither smiles nor weeps, nor does she quiver in hot anger, responsive to the joy, the sorrow, or the wrath of the frail creatures who fret out their little hour beneath her broad glance.

The excursion to the source of the river had not been a great success; the three men were more or less pre-occupied, Sibyl was unusually grave; only Eleanor appeared quite at ease.

When they had emptied the provision baskets at the picturesque cascade which foams down the live rock, the cradle of the frontier river, Paul left the group to go and buy fruit at a châlet hard by, and Edward followed him.

Paul was glad when he saw him coming; he had been wishing all the morning for the explanation he had at first avoided; he faced about at sight of him, but could not meet him pleasantly.

"Well!" he said abruptly, the memory of all the unintentional wrong Edward had ever done him rushing over him as he spoke the school-boy rivalries, the precedence Edward had always taken of him in the liking of strangers, his invariable better fortune till the last few months, and above all his sudden intrusion in the Arden dovecot, and his immediate success where he himself had sued vainly for years. Even his cousin's sweeter, calmer temper and his manly self-control were a cause of dislike; the very forbearance that Edward had shown in leaving the field clear to him for three months, embittered his heart against him; he could not help hating him for being the better man, and so justifying Alice's preference. He had brooded so long over his jealous dislike that all the finer elements of his nature were suppressed, the affection natural to him was quenched, the old habit of brotherhood broken; what formerly strengthened his friendship now fed his dislike. He was the true descendant of that man who had lain awake at night for six mortal weeks, putting a keen edge to the cutting phrases of one wounding letter. "Well!" he said, with a slight defiant movement of the head.

"Am I to congratulate you?" asked Edward.

"No. And you know it," he replied with biting emphasis. "But for your sudden appearance here I should have won her in time."

Light leapt into Edward's eyes; his colour deepened; it seemed to the embittered fancy of the other that he wore a look of subdued but insolent triumph. "My coming can have made no difference. If you did not win her in four months you would not in five," he replied.

"Look here, Paul," Edward added, after some moments of uncomfortable silence, "you may not believe it, but I am awfully sorry."

"It is possible that I may not believe it, my good fellow," Paul said with bitter sarcasm. "Allow *me* to congratulate *you*," he added.

"I quite thought you were engaged; everybody here believes it, and upon my honour—I was—not exactly glad—but pleased that you were the winner, since I had to be out of the running."

"I admire your magnanimity, my dear cousin," thought Paul; "nothing would give me greater pleasure than to help you out of a world for which you are too virtuous."

He did not say this, but when he spoke, the sound of his voice carried him beyond himself, and the pent-up torrent of jealousy and rage burst madly forth. Edward was so surprised by this exhibition, which was a revelation to him, that he listened in silent disgust, distinguishing and remembering nothing clearly beyond some wild hint of killing whoever should marry Alice, at which he smiled forbearingly; the most irritating thing he could do.

After some vain attempts, as well-meaning as they were fruitless, to bring Paul to a more rational condition, he gave up.

"I only irritate him in this mood, whatever I can say," he reflected, turning to leave him, stung into a contemptuous dislike for Paul, which was clearly expressed in his face.

"Stop!" cried Paul, with a sudden change of manner; but Edward refused to stop.

Paul strode some paces after him and then stopped, execrating the lack of self-control which had led him to make himself generally ridiculous. No one is so detestable as the man who has seen us in an undignified position; and since it was wounded pride which most fiercely barbed the arrow of his rejected love, the fury of Paul's hate and love and jealousy grew till it bid fair to stifle him, and it was some time before he could sufficiently compose himself outwardly to go back to the halting place.

Soon after he had joined them, the walking-party began to move away from the spring, when Eleanor, who had twisted her ankle just before, found that she could not stand on the injured foot, and it was decided that she must be carried down to the village, which was some miles distant. Her brother, therefore, set off at

once in search of some means of conveying her back to the village, and he had not long started before Paul followed him, saying nothing of his reason for leaving the rest of the party.

Sibyl and Gervase never forgot the impression his departing figure made upon them, as he disappeared gradually down the steep path, till even his face was finally lost to view. He walked with bent head and moody face like one impelled by some inward force, wholly absorbed in troubled thought and dead to all external things.

"Paul is so desperately glum to-day that it is a real relief to get rid of him for a time," Sibyl observed. "Or is that the professional air, the gravity of the leech, Gervase, do you suppose?"

"If Paul is glum, Edward is grimness incarnate," added Eleanor, pettishly; "they do nothing but scowl at each other. It is no pleasure to be with such a pair. Have they quarrelled?" Gervase smoked thoughtfully and silently for some twenty minutes. Then he told Sibyl that he would walk back to the village and see if he could help Edward in his search for some means of carrying his sister. "If all fails, we three can carry Nellie comfortably in an arm-chair," he said. "I suppose Paul will be back in a minute; if not, the châlet is close at hand, Sibyl, remember."

Alice in the meantime had ascended as far as she cared to go, and was waiting beneath a cluster of firs, where she found a seat upon some faggots by a tree. She sat wrapped in a dreamy peace, with a book unread on her knee, listening to the faint undertones which murmured beneath the afternoon stillness—the hum of a bee, the fitful music in the pines, the cracking of a dead branch —until the warmth, stillness and solitude imperceptibly soothed away her senses and weighed her eyelids down over her charmed eyes, and thoughts and images blended fantastically in her brain on the dim borders of dreamland. Then a voice stole upon her dream, the familiar voice of Gervase, saying she knew not what, but using incisive and resolute tones; another replied more earnestly still, a voice that stirred the deepest currents of her being, and she awoke, slowly opening her sleep-hazed eyes until the tree-trunks in front of her shaped themselves clearly upon her vision, and the blank spaces between them were filled and then vacated by the two passing figures.

"Yes," said the voice of Gervase, before the figures came into view, "I will keep that part of the business dark, I promise you that faithfully; one is not bound to reveal the whole. It would only cause needless suffering."

"Especially to *her*," returned Edward's voice; "they will naturally suppose I was not present—oh! above all *she* must never know."

"No; Alice must never know. You may rely upon me——" He stopped short, dismayed, for by this time they had come full into Alice's field of vision, passing outside the fir-trees. She was facing the opposite direction to that whence they came, and was screened from their view by the tree-trunk behind her until they had almost passed her, when Gervase's ever-watchful eyes caught the gleam of her light dress upon the needle-strewn ground.

"Why, Alice," he added, quickly recovering his self-possession; "are you alone?"

"Yes; I have been waiting," she replied. "Where are the others? What is the matter? Oh! Mr. Annesley, are you ill?"

Edward's face was grey, his lips quivered, his eyes shone with unnatural light; he looked at Alice with a sort of horror, as if she had been a spectre. Then he and Gervase regarded each other enquiringly for some moments, saying nothing.

This silence, so full of meaning, prepared Alice for evil tidings, although she was conscious of no thought while it lasted beyond a weak childish wonder that Edward should be wearing Paul's hat, a triviality that she communicated to no one at the time, though it recurred to her afterwards. She knew the hat by a piece of *edelweiss* in the band, which alone distinguished it from that worn in the morning by the other cousin.

"There is much the matter, Alice," replied Gervase at last, in grave measured tones. "There has been an accident."

Alice began to tremble; she had risen from her seat upon their approach, and now stayed herself against the trunk of a tree.

"Be calm, dear," said Gervase, laying his hand with soothing and magnetic effect upon her arm; "you must try to control yourself for the sake of his mother."

"It is Paul," Alice replied faintly; "is he much hurt?"

"He is dead—dead!" cried Edward, with an agitation he could not control.

"Oh! no," exclaimed Alice, "not dead, it is not true. Paul cannot be dead; it is not true."

A deep hard sob escaped from Edward.

"It is too true," continued Gervase in quiet, even tones which calmed her; "he slipped on the cliff's edge, poor fellow, up beyond there where the path is narrow. He fell into the river, and his body was quickly swept away by the current."

His body! Alice turned sick and tried to grasp the fact that the man she had seen that morning all aglow with passion and life, was lying quiet in the rushing waters below, hushed and silent for ever; all the storm and stress of his blighted hopes and vain

love swallowed up and stilled in the green waters flowing so tranquilly by in the sweet sunshine.

"Oh! Paul! Paul!" she sobbed in sudden remorseful agony. "Oh! if I had but known!"

"Hush!" said Gervase, in the tones that had such magnetic power over her. "It is no use to give way. Some one must break it to Mrs. Annesley."

Alice scarcely distinguished the sense of his words, though his voice calmed her. That strange avenger, Death, had so stirred the depths of pity and regret within her into the semblance of the remorse which he never fails to call up for the torture of the survivors, that she could only yearn vainly for the lost opportunity of saying one kind word to the man who had loved her so strongly and truly, though so wildly and selfishly, and remember that her last words to him had been words of reproach. The friendship of years awoke within her, and called up a thousand gentle happy memories of the friend whose life she had unwittingly marred, it obliterated all the harsher features of his character and accused her of needless severity to the dead. Why had she refused him? She might have grown to him and loved him, if she had tried, she thought in the first overpowering rush of pity and sorrow.

"*I* will tell Mrs. Annesley," she said at last, choking back the feelings which surged up within her. "And you, Mr. Annesley," she added, turning to Edward, who had been looking on in speechless anguish, apparently unobserved by her, "you are her nearest kinsman—you will take her son's place—will you not come with me?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Edward; "I am the last person she will wish to see."

Gervase perceived that each took the other's words in a sense different from that intended by the speaker, and smiled a subtle smile as he replied, "Annesley is right. I will tell her all myself later. Go and break what you know gently to her, Alice. I, in the meantime, must communicate with the authorities. You, Annesley, must return to your sister and Sibyl, who are left alone all this time. You and Stratfield"—Paul's servant—"might contrive a litter for her between you, in default of anything better."

Later on Alice passed an hour with the bereaved mother, on whom the shock produced a stupefying effect which merged in an utter prostration. She was roused from this seeming stupor some hours afterwards by the announcement that Gervase Rickman was ready to give her what details he could of her son's death. After a long interview with him she was asked if she would like to see her nephew, and replied in the affirmative.

Edward, therefore, entered her presence, calm and composed outwardly, but quivering with inward emotion. He tried to speak, but his lips refused utterance when he looked upon the suddenly aged and worn face before him. Mrs. Annesley was dry-eyed and apparently calm; she rose from her seat upon his entrance, and gazed steadily and sternly with glittering eyes upon him; then she spoke in the deep and tragic tones she could command upon occasion:

"Where is my son, Edward Annesley?" she asked; "what have you done with my only son?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE INHERITANCE.

THE memory of that scene weighed like a lasting nightmare upon Edward Annesley's troubled heart. When he entered his aunt's presence he expected something painful, but nothing terrible; he thought to see a bereaved mother, he found a tigress robbed of her cubs. All the fierceness in her nature blazed up at the sight of him, a grim joy possessed her at the opportunity of denouncing him as the cause of her loss; for where other women grieved, this one raged.

He could only stand silent before the storm, doing mute homage to her age, her sex, and her bitter sorrow; pained by the sight of a passion so like that he had witnessed a few hours since in one whose passions were now for ever stilled, and hoping that her frenzy would exhaust itself, that she might at least accept some kind words from him, if nothing more.

That which silently gnawed his heart was enough without spoken reproach; her words burnt into him like molten metal, and left life-long wounds. In everything, she said, he had supplanted her son; he had secretly stolen the heart of Alice from Paul whilst openly trifling with Sibyl, whose life he had marred. And now he had driven Paul to his death that he might snatch his inheritance. Let him take that inheritance with the curse attached to it, and a yet more withering curse on to that, the curse of a childless widow. She asked him how a strong and active man like her son could, *if alone*, slip and fall beyond recovery. She told him that the reproach of having survived him would cling to him and blight his happiness for life.

All this she said in a few cutting words, without agitation, with a deep full voice, standing erect and immovable, with a hard brilliance in her cold blue eyes, and when she had finished, she bid him go and come near her no more.

He hesitated, looking silently at her stern tearless face, in which he saw such bitter anger that he thought the shock must have made her beside herself. He hoped that what she said was half-unconscious and would be forgotten when she came to herself.

Nevertheless the barbed words struck home, and her cold immovable calm impressed him with a horror he could not shake off, and seeing that his presence only irritated her, he withdrew with some expressions of regret for her condition, and a hope that he should find her calmer on the morrow.

Mrs. Annesley laughed a hard laugh, and said quietly that she never had been and never should be calmer than at that moment, which was perfectly true. But when the door had closed upon him, and her gaze fell upon some trifle that Paul had given her, the calm deserted her, a sense of her bitter bereaval took hold of her, the memory of a thousand stormy scenes in which she had wounded her only son rose up accusingly before her, and she sobbed and moaned, and felt herself to be the most miserable woman upon earth.

Edward left her, scarce knowing what he did or whither he went. He and she alone knew how the scar came upon Paul's face; she had looked when that occurred as she looked now. He wondered if he could be the same man who had left the gipsy party at the river's source a few hours before and had stepped lightly along the rocky path in the sunshine, singing in the lightness of his heart.

He met Sibyl in the corridor, and she, seeing the misery in his face, gave way to one of those guileless impulses she never could resist, and laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Dear Mr. Annesley," she said, in her clear light voice, "I am so sorry for you. All this must be so painful."

He said nothing, but kissed the hand she had given him, and passed on with a full heart. Sibyl alone condoled with him on that day's work, he reflected, and then the barbed arrow of his aunt's suggestion about her rankled in his heart.

He went into the sitting-room, where his sister lay on a couch with Alice sitting by her side.

By this time it was dark night, the lonely village was asleep, only the hotel lights still burnt, and even they were gradually dying out; but the Annesley party did not yet dream of going to rest, they were waiting and watching for the return of the searchers with their tragic burden.

Alice sat in the shadow; she had only seen Edward once since the meeting under the pine-trees, and she had then observed, in the brief glance she caught of him, that the *edelweiss* was removed from his hat.

The sight of her stirred Edward with a feeling akin to pain—a mysterious something bid him fly from her; for Paul's untimely fate had reared a barrier between them, insurmountable for the

time. It seemed an unfair advantage over the dead man, even to recall his assurance that there was no chance of his winning her, or to consider the meaning in Alice's voice, when she cried upon Paul in her sudden remorse in the wood: "Oh, Paul, Paul! If I had but known!"

She was very calm now, though he could not see her face in the shadow; but calmness, he knew well, was no index to the depth of her sorrow; it was her nature in joy and grief to command herself. Yet he thought she wished to avoid him.

"Have you been to auntie, Ned?" asked Eleanor, starting up at his step.

"Yes," he answered heavily, and he sat down and gazed blankly before him.

"Nellie," said Alice, "do you think you could go to your aunt?"

"She had better not," replied Edward quickly; "it would be too painful."

"But Mrs. Annesley must not be left alone," said Alice, with some reproach in her voice. "I am afraid your interview has been trying, Mr. Annesley—but how could it be otherwise? Is she no calmer?"

"I believe," returned Edward slowly, "that she is out of her mind."

"Poor soul! Then I will go to her at once," said Alice, rising.

"She is better alone, Miss Lingard," interposed Edward hastily; "pray don't subject yourself to anything so dreadful. She is not accountable for what she says now—no one must believe what she says—her grief must have its way. Her maid is at hand.—Pray, Miss Lingard."—He even barred the way when she would have left the room, and held the door shut behind him, until a pressure from without caused him to open it and disclose the face of Gervase, who had seen his meeting with Sibyl a few moments before.

"Alice is right," Gervase said, on hearing the cause of dispute; "Mrs. Annesley is not fit to be left alone; it would be cruel. Nellie is too young, and just now too unwell, and Sibyl—well, Sibyl could not be what Alice is to her."

Alice therefore went, with every word that Edward had just uttered so hastily and brokenly sinking permanently into her memory. Mrs. Annesley roused herself at the sight of her to repeat her denunciation of Edward, in tones of sorrowful conviction this time.

Alice, inwardly trembling, did what she could to soothe the now terribly agitated woman, and bid her consider before accusing

Edward in the hearing of others, thankful that, as she supposed, she alone had as yet heard anything.

"Dear Mrs. Annesley," she remonstrated, "you imply that he had a hand in your son's death when you speak so."

"Alice," replied Mrs. Annesley, quietly and coldly, "do you know where Edward was at the moment of Paul's fall?"

"No," she replied simply; "how should I?"

"How indeed?" repeated Mrs. Annesley, setting her lips hard; "that is what no one knows or ever will know."

"It is very simple, dear," said Alice, "we will ask him."

"Ask him!" returned Mrs. Annesley, with terrible scorn—"ask him yourself, Alice."

Then her mood changed, and she suddenly fell to weeping, staying herself upon Alice.

"Oh, Alice! Alice!" she cried, "my poor child loved you—he loved you!" and their tears mingled, and the bitterness seemed to pass away.

Paul's body was never found. They waited and watched in vain that night. Alice thought that if she could look once more upon his dead face, and press one repentant kiss upon the cold brow that could never more thrill with passion, even at the touch of her lips, she would be happier and perhaps lose the unreasoning remorse which troubled her now.

The current was strong at the spot where he fell; the bursting of an Alpine thunderstorm about an hour after the accident increased the difficulty of the search which was quickly instituted. There were good reasons why the body, if discovered by chance, should be concealed again. Paul wore a valuable watch, and had a good deal more money in his pocket than prudent people care to carry about, and, as it was ascertained that he had not given the diamonds into the jeweller's charge before leaving Neufchâtel, and they were not found among his effects, it was inferred that they, too, were upon him.

Edward passed some weary weeks in Switzerland, a time of fruitless search for the missing body, and of apparently endless formalities with regard to the death, a time which he spent entirely apart from his aunt, who refused to see him and only communicated with him through Gervase and her other lawyers. Then he returned to England, the gainer of a great inheritance that he did not want, burdened with responsibilities and rich with opportunities that he had never coveted and would gladly have renounced in exchange for the sunny peace of mind he enjoyed when travelling on the rail through the mountains only a few weeks earlier.

Mrs. Annesley stayed on some little time after his departure before she went home, a white-haired, broken-hearted woman. Alice Lingard, the only creature to whom she now showed any affection, remained with her, surrounding her with tender cares, and trying to soften the bitter blow which had fallen upon her. Sibyl and Eleanor had returned to their respective homes immediately after the accident; the two women were thus alone with their loss, and the elder entreated the younger to make her home with her, and remain with her altogether to cheer her desolation.

But Alice, without refusing absolutely to entertain this proposal, said that it was too early yet to form any definite plans; they would wait and consider, and decide nothing till the healing hand of Time had wrought some comfort in Mrs. Annesley's stricken heart.

CHAPTER VII

BY THE RIVER.

A SHORT time before they left the village in the Jura, Alice one day gathered some late autumn flowers and bound them together, and Gervase Rickman, who had remained with Mrs. Annesley, journeying backwards and forwards on business connected with Paul's death, asked her for what purpose she had gathered them.

"I am going for a long walk," she replied, evasively, and she did not ask him to accompany her; but he saw her go in the direction of the path which wound along the river's rocky bank towards its source, and presently he went the same way with a view to meeting her as if by accident.

"That old woman will be the death of her if this goes on much longer," he said to himself, glad that he had urged his father and mother to call her back to Arden.

It was now October; the hush of the solemn autumn lay upon the mountain pastures and the fading, dreaming woods, and although, lower down in the warm valleys and sheltered folds of the mountains, some grapes still remained glowing in the hot sunshine in the vineyards, and the country was alive with the songs and shouts of the vintagers, and full of the mellow, intoxicating odour of crushed grapes, up there on the green Jura slopes the frosts had been keen and the winds chill. But on this afternoon all was peace; the sun shone warmly with a last, relenting glow before the unchaining of the winter tempests, and Alice was glad to lose herself in the beauty of the quiet season.

She made her way through the wood in which she had rested shortly before she had heard the heavy tidings of Paul's death a month since, and, though the way was long, did not pause until she reached the spot upon the cliff's edge where he slipped and fell on that unfortunate day. There she rested, looking down into the green waters, now turbid from the heavy equinoctial rains, and thought it all over. Then she took the flowers, and threw them carefully down the cliff, so that they might clear the trees and bushes which grew here and there in the unevennesses and clefts in the rocky wall, and fall into the river, where she watched

them swerve with the current, and float down the stream, till a jutting buttress of rock hid them from her gaze. Just so Paul's lifeless body must have been borne away. It seemed as if her heart went with the flowers and sank in the waters for ever with the body of her ill-starred lover.

Her face was worn with care, there were dark hollows beneath her eyes; the shadow of Mrs. Annesley's grief lay heavily upon her youth; it was crushing all the brightness out of her, and besides that, she carried the heavy burden of an unspoken fear within her, and waged a daily, wasting warfare with a suspicion that grew stronger from the combat. She had ceased openly to rebut Mrs. Annesley's accusations of her nephew, but nevertheless the continual allusions made by the latter told upon her. She learnt now of the long rivalry between the cousins, dangerous half-truths; she heard of a quarrel at Medington.

Paul had himself betrayed his jealousy of Edward in that unfortunate boat scene; the distant and almost hostile terms on which the cousins were, had been evident to the whole party. Alice knew something of Paul's temper; she knew well what maddening things he could say when his blood was stirred to white heat; she could well imagine that Edward's temper, though sweet enough, would give way before Paul's cutting sarcasms, and betray him into what was foreign to his nature at calmer times. But why had he chosen the tortuous course of concealment, which the words she overheard him say by the river implied?

She could not forgive him that; a man capable of that was not to be trusted, nor was one stained with so dark a thing as homicide worth the thought she was wasting on him. The reproach was already beginning to work upon Annesley.

When Alice had been sitting thus, brooding on these disquieting thoughts a good twenty minutes, during which some of the autumn peace had stolen into her heart, her mournful reverie was broken by the appearance of Gervase Rickman.

"This is not a good place for you," he said, with gentle rebuke; "I am glad you will soon be far away."

"It is a farewell visit," she replied, looking up, her eyes bright with rising tears. "Come and sit on this rock, and tell me exactly what you saw on that day. When I have seen it all in imagination clearly before me, I shall brood less upon it, perhaps."

He sat down at her bidding, and looked wistfully at her, wishing she would ask him anything else, meaning to ask her to spare him the pain of the narration, reflecting that she would think such shrinking on his part unmanly, longing vainly to be saved from a temptation beyond his strength.

"Tell me all," she repeated, seeing that he hesitated; "it will do me good."

So he took up his tale, and said that he had followed the two cousins from the river's source on the day of Paul's death, partly to see what had become of Paul, who had left them for no apparent purpose, partly to help Edward to find some means of carrying Nellie down to Bourget; that, as he approached the spot on which they were now sitting, where the ground was broken, and sloped suddenly down to the cliff's edge, he heard a cry, and running up, saw Paul clinging to the birch-tree beneath them, the snapped trunk of which showed that it had given way beneath his weight. He saw the tree bound and rebound, before it finally snapped, and Paul fell into the water, and was seen no more. It was his opinion at the time that Paul, who could not swim, had been killed or disabled by striking on the rocky bed of the stream. He called and ran for help, which he found in the shape of some men at work higher up. Edward Annesley then appeared upon the scene. That was the whole story.

"Why did Mr. Annesley not appear sooner, when Paul cried for help?" asked Alice, quietly.

"That I am unable to explain," Gervase returned drily "perhaps he did not hear."

"Then why did he come at all?"

"Perhaps he heard, but was too far off to arrive sooner."

"Gervase," said Alice, turning and looking him full in the face; "you are not telling the whole truth."

He was obliged to meet her eyes for a moment; but immediately averted his gaze and breathed quickly, not knowing what to say.

"You are concealing something," she repeated.

"There are occasions, Alice," he replied, "on which one is bound in honour to be silent."

Then she remembered the promise she had overheard, and her heart grew faint.

"It may be right for you to be silent," she returned, "but only if you have promised."

"Alice," continued Gervase, earnestly, "unless you wish to do Edward Annesley harm, you had better not enter too closely into details."

"I don't believe it," she replied, vehemently; "truth will not harm him, but concealment may."

"Well! I can only repeat what I say: if you wish to injure him, the means are at hand."

Alice plucked a spray of juniper which grew near, and tore it to pieces in agitated silence.

"It is curious," reflected Gervase, "that reigning princes are always at war with heirs-apparent. The Annesleys were the best of friends till this ill-fated inheritance fell to Paul."

"Do you think that set them at variance?"

"Undoubtedly. But Paul had another cause of strife; he was jealous, you know how causelessly, of Edward. Paul never could understand how meaningless are half-a-dozen sugared words from a military man, accustomed to two flirtations a week on an average. He could still less understand that a man who means nothing can be jealous from vanity. He was thoroughly loyal, poor fellow!"

"He was, indeed," Alice replied, absently. She was thinking, with a sinking heart, that she must forget Edward, since he had never cared for her, as Gervase, so good a reader of character, plainly saw, and with brotherly affection and delicate tact pointed out to her. She was thinking, with still deeper pain, that silence with regard to that fatal hour upon the banks of the Doubs was the greatest kindness Edward's friends could show him; his own words on that afternoon as well as Gervase's present hints were witnesses to that. How blinded she had been to his true character by the glamour of her unasked love! How little she had dreamed that the very failing she censured so severely in Paul, want of self-control, was that of the man she preferred before him; the evil heritage of the Annesleys showing itself, not, as in the slain man, in an unbridled surrender of himself to his loves and likings, but in an inability to master the anger Paul's sarcasm and unwarrantable jealousy must have kindled in him. Paul was headlong and uncurbed in love, and thus lost her; Edward was evidently headlong and uncurbed in wrath. She repudiated a yet darker motive on the part of the heir to so rich a property, a motive urged by Mrs. Annesley in moments of confidence; the worst thing to be attributed to Edward probably was yielding to a passionate impulse that circumstances made criminal. She looked at Gervase, and realized that, slight as her strength was comparatively, a vigorous push on her part would send him beyond recovery over the verge on that broken and mossy ground; she pictured two men walking or standing there, and saw that only blind passion or criminal intention could ignore the fatal issue of a blow in such a spot. And passion so blind, so reckless of consequence amounted to crime. What an inheritance this man had gained! his heart must indeed be hard if he ever derived any satisfaction from a thing won at so terrible a cost. Her heart went out in pity to him, but she hoped that she was incapable of any warmer feeling for such a man. Yet the pity was so strong that it blanched her face, and set her lip quivering in spite of herself.

"Leave me," she said, turning to Gervase with dimmed eyes; "let me be a few minutes. If you like to wait in the wood, I can overtake you."

He rose at once and left her, with the tact so distinctive of him, and Alice shaded her face with her hand and watched the turbid waters flowing past. She knew that there could be no more happiness for Edward Annesley in this world unless his heart were quite hard and bad, as few human hearts are; and she could not think him very bad, hardly as others might judge the man she had been upon the verge of loving. She sat gazing on the river till the hot tears blinded her, seeing her youth and hope borne away upon the green waters which had engulfed Paul Annesley. She wondered how people managed to live whose hopes were broken; she had heard of maimed lives dragging themselves painfully along through weary sunless years; she tried to summon her courage to meet such a fate, but it seemed too soon yet to piece the broken fragments of her life together. She wept on till she almost wept her heart out. Then she grew calm, the mighty peace which brooded over the sunshiny afternoon, with its careless midges fated to die in an hour, its humming-bees busy in the ivy-blossom, and its pigeons fluttering out from the great sombre silent pines, once more touched her heart, and a still mightier peace than even that of Nature sank into it. She felt that a life so broken as hers might be put to some nobler, more unselfish purpose than one in which the music had never been marred. To blend those broken chords into some diviner harmony would henceforth give her soul courage and purpose.

And Edward? She could only pray for him. Perhaps that strong feeling so near akin to love had been given her that sacrificial incense might not be wanting on his behalf, though he should fail to offer it himself, as was just and due.

She rose and rejoined Gervase in the wood below with a serene face and eyes full of spiritual exaltation. He looked at her for a moment and saw that she had been crying; then he averted his glance and offered her a bunch of late-blooming heather. She fixed it in the black dress she wore in memory of Paul, scarcely acknowledging an attention that was so usual with him, and they went tranquilly down the hill-side through the wood and over the marshy waste where the cotton-rush grew, in the lengthening ruddying sunshine, among the gradually hushing sounds of the evening, Alice little dreaming of the passion which enveloped the purple heath-flowers as with burning flame. She clung in spirit to Gervase, leaning all the more upon his calm brotherly friendship because of the bitterness which had resulted from the love of

others. Gervase had loved her, too, but he had known how to conquer a feeling which gave her pain, and she was grateful to him.

When, nearly an hour later, they entered the bleak village street, they saw Edward Annesley leaning over the low stone garden wall of the house in which he lodged, with his face turned towards the setting sun. With a pipe in his mouth and his hands clasped together at the back of his head, which was slightly thrown back to command a better view of the splendid cloud-pageant in the west, the glory of which was reflected on his face, he looked the picture of tranquil enjoyment, and the sight of him grated painfully on Alice's feelings, wound up, as they were, to such a pitch. His heart must indeed be hard, she thought, her own recoiling from the pity she had been lavishing upon him.

When he saw them, he put away the pipe and came to meet them, and the ruddy glow of the sunset faded from his face, which looked pale and careworn.

"I am starting from Neufchâtel to-night for England," he said. "Can I do anything for you, Miss Lingard?"

"Thank you, nothing," she replied coldly, and he saw that her eyes had recently been full of tears.

"You won't forget the parcel for my sister, Annesley, will you?" said Gervase.

"Certainly not. I will give it into her own hands," he replied. "Good-bye, Miss Lingard."

"Good-bye." She suffered him to take her unresponsive hand in his firm clasp and passed on, glad to think she should meet him no more, at least for the present; and he remained, gazing after her wistfully, with a vague presentiment that he might never see her again.

Gervase left Alice at the hotel door and then returned to Edward, who was no longer gazing at the sunset but upon the blank high front of the hotel, which rose sheer and unbroken from the street, vaguely suggesting mountain desolation without its accompanying grandeur.

"I am afraid she is feeling it terribly," he said, when Gervase came up.

"Poor girl! what can you expect?" replied Gervase. "The only wonder to me is that she bears up so bravely. It does her no good to be here upon the scene, making pilgrimages to the fatal spot and throwing flowers into that dark and dreary river."

"Of course not," he returned, wondering how Gervase could speak of those things in that offhand way. He had himself

seen her leave the village with the garden flowers, and it was not difficult to guess where she had been. "Do try and get her away, Rickman. I cannot understand," he added, after a pause, "why they were not formally engaged. There is no doubt now that she did care for him."

"None whatever. But Paul's was a morbid, jealous nature; he may have taken a mere rebuff for a refusal."

"True."

"The best of women have little coquettish ways which men never understand," pursued Gervase, with a reflective air. "A girl draws back half shyly, half to bring her lover on, and the stupid fellow takes her literally and flies off in a fury and throws himself into the nearest pond, if he does not take to drinking."

"Women should be more honest," said Edward, fiercely. "They should not drive men who love them to despair. Yet the woman always gets the worst of it in the end."

"It depends on the kind of woman."

"Do you think she has any suspicion of the truth?" he continued.

"No, I think not. Indeed I am sure not."

"I trust she never will."

"She will canonize Paul and pass the remainder of her days in worshipping the memory of the man she drove to desperation in his lifetime. It is a pity."

"She is young. Time will heal her."

"You don't know Alice Lingard, Annesley. Her life was spoilt by that unlucky occurrence on the river. Poor girl! Sibyl, now, is of a different stamp; yet they are wonderfully alike in some respects. I'll see you to the station. Time is up."

PART IV.

CHAPTER I.

SHEEP-SHEARING.

THE tall elms bordering the lane leading to Arden Manor had just completed their yearly toilet, and spread out broad masses of delicate green foliage, as yet unstained by dust and undarkened by sun, against the clear blue sky, over which little clouds floated high up, pearly and ethereal as fairy cars. Cottage gardens were balmy with the indescribable freshness of lilac flowers; an occasional rose in a sunny corner opened its sweet blossom with a sort of shy wonder at its own beauty, and was a treasure for a village lad to give to a sweetheart, because it was so rare. The may had not yet faded from the thorn hedges, it bloomed white in the hollows of the downs, flushing pink and pinker as summer drew on; buttercups made the deep pastures sheets of burnished gold; the spicy breath of clover filled the air.

"I hreckon Squire Rickman 'll hae a powerful weight of hay this year, Dan'l Pink," Raysh Squire prophesied, as he took a thoughtful survey of the meadow which lay beyond the rickyard, by the rail fence of which he was standing in the fresh sunshine one fine afternoon.

The shepherd was too much pre-occupied to give serious heed to Raysh's prophecies. With out-stretched arms and thoughtful face he stood making strange, dog-like noises at a few sheep, which had slipped by mischance from the pen in the midst of the straw-yard before the barn, when the hurdles had been opened narrowly so as to let the sheep through one by one into the barn, the folding doors of which stood wide, and upon the floor of which knelt bare-armed shearers, each with a heap of panting wool before him, through which the shears moved with a quick glitter and snapping, sometimes followed by a piteous bleat if a maladroit movement drove the keen points into the tender flesh.

Rough, the wolf-like sheep-dog, barked with zealous skill on the opposite side, and soon managed, with his master's help, to drive the wanderers back into their narrow fold, where they stood huddled closely together, heavy-fleeced and snow-white from their recent washing, vainly protesting by querulous bleatings against the spoliation their brethren were undergoing. Perhaps they were anticipating the time when they too would lie mute and defenceless beneath the shearer's hands, and then arise, white and attenuated, and trot, the thin spectres of their former plump, fleecy selves, out at the opposite door into the green meadow beyond, where the shorn creatures nibbled at the sweet grass in the sunshine, plaintively bemoaning their unaccustomed lightness, with their slim bodies sometimes streaked with blood.

It was an anxious time for Daniel; bleak winds and chill rains might still come in these early June days; he could not bear to see the marks upon the creatures' sides, and was inclined to blame the shearers' clumsiness, while they laid it to the charge of the sheep, who were apt, after a few minutes' perfect quiescence, to kick out of a sudden and jerk the operator's hand. Daniel was always thankful when shearing-time was well at an end, and the sheep had become accustomed to the loss of their winter coats. Not so the boys, half-a-dozen of whom were standing about; they delighted in the fun and frolic of helping to catch the stray sheep and haul them along with many a tumble and tussle, now and then holding a restive creature for the shearer. Still more they delighted in the washing, which had taken place down at the valley farm, where there was a good pond with hatches, and where one of the lads, helping to push a great fat ram in the water, had fallen plump in with the struggling beast, to the loud laughter of the rest.

The gardener was busy in the barn, the cow-man stopped and looked in to see how the shearers were getting on, on his way from the cow-house with the evening's milk in the pails; John Nobbs, the bailiff, stood by the pen with his stout legs apart and his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and allowed it was "mis'able warm;" Mam Gale, from the "Traveller's Rest," was there to serve out the ale, the four o'clock, in place of the bailiff's wife, who was laid by; a smart and smiling maid, another of the shepherd's daughters, attended her; the farmyard was full of sunshiny bustle, and alive with the sound of human voices, the bleating and lowing of animals, and cackle of poultry.

Mr. Rickman stood by the bailiff with a pensive air, and

looked on with a sort of gentle enquiry in his eyes, remarking to Gervase, who had ridden over from Medington that afternoon, that a master's eye was everything. So Gervase thought, and his keen glance was everywhere, and every one knew it. The cow-man lingered no more than was reasonable on his way to the dairy; the boys took care to play no tricks, or let sheep through the fold; the carters, bringing their horses to water, dared not loiter; the shearers did not pause in their work while they chattered with that arch-gossip, Raysh Squire, whose special object in being there it was not easy to define, unless it were that he considered it his duty as parish clerk to keep an eye on the vicar's handful of sheep, since those ecclesiastical creatures were undergoing the same fate as their lay brethen.

Yet this was scarcely necessary, since not only Joshua Young, the vicarage gardener and 'factotum, was lending a hand, but the vicar himself, his round hat on the back of his head, and his spectacles accurately balanced upon his nose, stood by Mr. Rickman's side and looked upon the group of shearers with interest. Whether the scene suggested any analogy with a tithe dinner to him he did not say.

"A pleasing spectacle, Merton," Mr. Rickman observed to him; "so primitive and pastoral. Virgil's eyes beheld it, and even David's. Much as science has done in destroying the poetry of rural life, we do not yet shear our sheep by steam."

"Or electricity," added Gervase; "but we shall."

"I am glad the weather is warm for the poor things," said Mr. Merton, who was eminently practical.

"It is fortunate, or rather providential. God truly tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," replied Mr. Rickman, under the impression that he was quoting Scripture, and thus paying a fitting compliment to Mr. Merton's cloth.

The proverb was new to the shepherd, who took it in with his outward ears and laid it aside in the dim cells of his memory for future contemplation. At present he was fully occupied with an idea which had come to him years ago, and which refreshed him annually, if the weather was fine, when he stood in Arden farmyard at shear time, and looked though the two sets of open barn-doors to the upland meadow beyond—the meadow steeped in sunshine till the grass was liquid emerald and the sheep browsing there were made of transparent light. The shadowed barn, into which some few shafts of light shot transversely, irradiating far dark corners, made a black frame for the sunny mead, thus enhancing its brilliance and lending it an ethereal beauty.

Paradise, the shepherd thought, must be something like that green, flower-starred meadow, glowing with living light. Up there the Celestial Shepherd's flock rested peacefully, feeding in the warm radiance, some of them with bleeding sides that would soon be healed for ever. Down in the yard the sheep were penned together, hungering, panting, scared, driven they knew not whither or wherefore, like men in the cruel world. Sooner or later all must lie under the shearer's hands, like men beneath the stern shears of necessity; those that kicked bled, those that lay still beneath the sharp blades were unwounded, and more quickly set at liberty in the sweet pastures above. So the shepherd mused, looking stolid and vacant, as he stood in his smock frock with his crook in his hand, pulling his forelock in answer to some question addressed to him by the vicar.

"Shear-time aint what it was when you and me was young, Mam Gale," said Raysh Squire, graciously accepting a mug of four o'clock from the latter. "I minds when half the country-zide come to a shear feast."

"And bide half the night the volk would, wi' viddles and singing," she replied. "Many's the song I've a yeard you zing at shear-time, Master Squire. Massy on us! here comes Squire Annesley!"

The shearers' eyes were all lifted at the click of the farm-gate, through which Edward Annesley was just riding in search of Gervase Rickman, whom he had tracked from his office in Medington and finally run to earth at Arden.

Seeing Mr. Rickman, he got off, giving his horse in charge of a carter, and walked round the pen to the three gentlemen, whose backs were turned, so that they were not aware of his presence until he had nearly joined them, when Gervase came to meet him.

Mr. Rickman received him with his wonted cordiality, but the Vicar, with a distant salutation to the new-comer, said something about an appointment and hurried away, promising to look in later.

Edward's face flushed and darkened as he looked after the retreating figure of the clergyman, and he made some satirical reference to the unusual amount of business the latter appeared to have on hand.

"It is too bad of me to invade your leisure, Rickman," he added; "for if any mortal man earns his holidays, you do. But I shall not be in Medington for a day or two, and I want five minutes' conversation with you, if you can spare them. How well your sheep look, Mr. Rickman! Are these the prize South-downs?"

"These?" echoed Mr. Rickman with a puzzled air. "I rather think they are; eh, Gervase?"

"Those in the meadow," replied Gervase; and he asked Edward if he remembered when Mr. Rickman could not be made to understand why the sheep-washing would not do as well after the shearing, which he thought would be so much more convenient.

"I remember that sheep-shearing well," Edward replied. "Paul and I stayed here a couple of nights one Whitsuntide holidays."

The peculiar, unpleasant smell of the sheep, their querulous bleating, the click of shears and clack of tongues, brought back the far-off sunny holidays clearly, with a mixture of pleasure and pain to his mind. The long ago always has something sad, however sweet it may be; but subsequent events had given these memories a sting. The two boys had helped to push the unwilling sheep into the water. Once they stole some shears and cut the horses' manes and poor little Sibyl's hair. She used to trot after them like a little dog, and was always putting them up to mischief, and involving them in scrapes, innocent in intention. He could see her great dark eyes, and hear Paul's merry laugh now. It pained him to recall those golden days, and think how far they then were from dreaming of the black shadow which was to rise between them, extinguishing one life, darkening the other.

"To be sure; how the time goes and the children spring up," Mr. Rickman said, as they went past the monastic-looking barns and the bailiff's stone-buttressed house to the Manor; "how the time goes and nothing remains," he repeated, going in and leaving them alone to despatch their business.

Scarcely a year had passed since Paul's death, and little more than a year since the fated inheritance fell to him so unexpectedly by the extinction of the elder branch of Annesleys. But Edward looked years older than when some fifteen months before an accident brought him to Arden Manor to tangle the web of so many lives. Gervase Rickman would not now call him a good-looking fool if he saw him for the first time. His face then wore the unwritten expression of early youth, that strange half-tranced look which has such a charm for older people; it was stamped to-day with an indelible record; the features, beautiful then with young and gentle curves, had become marked and masculine, though what was lost in grace was gained in strength. The old ready smile and frank, good-humoured look had given place to a stern, almost defiant expression. He was now grave and taciturn;

the reproach of which Mrs. Annesley had spoken seemed branded upon him.

Was that Squire Annesley? one of the shearers who came from a distance was asking, and was it true, as folk averred, that he had sold himself to the devil for Gledesworth lands?

"Some say there's a curse on the Gledesworth lands, and it do seem like it," John Nobbs replied; "there was never a Squire of Gledesworth without trouble yet."

"Ah! Mr. Nobbs, there's that on the back of Squire Annesley would break any one of ourn, let alone the heft of the curse," added Mam Gale, with a mysterious air.

"What was it he done?" asked the shearer.

"Some say he shoved 'tother one over cliff," replied Raysh Squire. "Whatever he done he drove a bad bargain for hisself. Gledesworth lands is wide and Gledesworth lands is hrich, but all Gledesworth lands isn't worth what goes on inzide of he."

"Bad luck they lands brings," said a shearer; "look at Squire Paul!"

"A good dacter was spiled in he," observed Mam Gale, thoughtfully inverting her tin mugs to get rid of heel-taps; "he had as good a eye for the working of volks' inzides as Mr. Nobbs hev fur the pints of beestes. Poor Ellen, she couldn't go off comfortable without him. 'Twas he zent our Hreub abroad with young Mrs. Annesley, and made a man of 'n."

Then the others recalled traits of Paul's excellence. Joshua Young dilated on the wild wet night-ride he had taken to his father; Raysh averred that no one else had ever grappled so successfully with Grandmother Squire's rheumatism; Jim Reed, one of the shearers, showed the scars on his arm, which had once been torn in a threshing-machine, and which Paul Annesley had saved from amputation. To Paul, as to many another artist, fame came in full flood when death had made him deaf to it.

"A understanden zart of a dacter was Paul Annesley," said John Nobbs. "You minds when I was down in the fever, Dan'l Pink. There was I with no more power of meself than a dree weeks babe. This yer hand," he held up a broad brown fist in the sunshine, "was so thin as a eggshell; you med a looked drough 'en. My missus, she giv me up. Mr. Merton said 'twas pretty nigh time to think on my zins. Squire Hrickman, he called in a town doctor, let alone doctering of me hisself. Thinks I to mezelf, 'John Nobbs,' I thinks, 'you've a got to goo, and the quieter you goos the better, they wunt let your widow want while she keeps her health for dairy work.' There I bid a-bed and never knowed night from noon. Dr. Annesley, he came in and

felt the pulse of me. Then he looks pretty straight at me, 'John Nobbs,' he says, 'you've got down mis'able low, but you've a powerful fine constitution, it's a pity to let a constitution like yourn goo,' he says, kind of sorrowful. 'There aint a man in Arden,' he says, 'with a better eye fur cattle than yourn, John Nobbs.' When he said this yer, I sort of waked up, fur I zimmed going off quiet like when he come in, and darned if I didn't begin to cry, I was that weak and low. 'Come now,' he says, 'you aint easy beät, John Nobbs; you've abeen through wet harvests and bad lambing times, and you never give in. Don't you give in to this yer fever, John Nobbs. Drink off this yer stuff and make up your mind you wunt be beät, and you'll hae the laugh of we doctors,' he says cheerful and easy. 'Make up your mind you wunt be beät, John Nobbs,' he says. With that he poured some warm stuff into me and he heft me up in bed and put some pillows hround me, and bid me look out of window. Thinks I to myself, 'You med so well hae another look hround, John Nobbs, avore you goos.' And there when I looked hround athirt the archard, where the apple-trees was all hred with bloom and the sunshine was coming down warm on 'em, and I zeen wuld Sorrel in close with a foal capering at her zide, and the meadow beyond put up for hay with the wind blowing the grass about, and smelt the beän-blossom drough the open window, and zeen everything coming on so nice, I zimmed miserable queer. Then I says to mezelf, 'John Nobbs,' I zes, 'you look sharp and get up and mow that there grass, and thank the Lord, who have give you as good a eye for judgen cattle and as good a hand for a straight furrow as any man alive,' I zes. And here I be," he added in conclusion, passing a red handkerchief over his broad face.

"Sure enough, Mr. Nobbs, there you be," echoed Raysh, thoughtfully surveying the bailiff's substantial body as if trying to persuade himself that he was indeed no aërial vision likely to fade from his gaze. "Without he you'd a ben in lytten long with your vatther up in the narth-east carner by the wall; aye, you'd a ben in church lytten, Mr. Nobbs, sure enough."

"They do say 'twas all along of a ooman they two fell out," said Joshua Baker.

"Zure enough," replied Mam Gale, "Miss Lingard favoured the captain first, then comes the doctor and she favoured he, and then they both come together and she favoured 'em both and then they fell out."

"Ah," said one of the shearers, pausing in the act of turning over the sheep upon the floor before him, "wherever there's mischief there's a ooman, I'll warn't."

"Womankind," observed Raysh with mournful acquiescence, "is a auspicious zart, a ter'ble auspicious zart is the female zart."

"Womankind," retorted Mam Gale, who was leaving the barn with leisurely reluctance, "med hae their vaults, as I wunt deny. But massy on us! come to think of men volk; when their vaults is took away, there ain't nothen left of 'em, nor a scriddick."

"Womankind," continued Raysh, majestically disregarding this interruption, "was made to bring down the pride of man. Adam, he was made fust, and he got that proud and vore-right drough having nobody to go agen en, there was no bearen of 'n. Then Eve, she was made, and she pretty soon brought 'n down, and that was the Fall of Man as you med all hread in the Bible."

"You goo on, Raysh," retorted Jim Reed; "you thinks nobody knows the Bible athout 'tis you."

"Well, I 'lows this young ooman have got summat to answer for," said the stranger shearer; "she ought to a cleaved to one and left t'other, which is likewise in the Bible, instead of wivveren about between the two to their destruction."

"It's a mis'able bad job, and talking won't mend it," said John Nobbs, turning the conversation, when he saw Sibyl standing on the granary steps at the other end of the yard, scattering handfuls of grain before her for the fowls, who came hurriedly flocking from all parts, cackling and clucking and jostling one another as they rushed helter-skelter in response to her call.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUESTION

THE business for which Annesley had wished to see Gervase Rickman was soon done, and did not involve even going into the house. While they were still talking and pacing up and down beneath the fresh-leaved trees, Hubert the deer-hound came bounding up in his long sweeping stride and placed his muzzle confidingly in Edward's hand, looking up at him with a world of affection in his soft dark eyes.

"This creature loves me," he said, patting his head; "dogs are whimsical in their likings: some instinct must tell him that I like him."

"He takes no notice of me, the brute," replied Gervase with asperity; he was jealous of the dog, who favoured him with a watchful side-long glance. "I had to thrash him once, and he never forgave it."

"And I never will," was the mute response in Hubert's eye.

"His mistress cannot be far off," Gervase added; "perhaps you will come in, Annesley—the ladies are all at home."

"I had intended calling before I heard that you were here," he replied with a hesitating air. "Oh, there is your father," he said, catching sight of Mr. Rickman, who was issuing from the hall porch with his usual bewildered air, as if he had just waked from a sound sleep, and was wondering where on earth he was. In a moment Annesley had joined the old gentleman and was asking him to give him a few minutes in private, to which Mr. Rickman readily assented, taking him to his study, an apartment which had formerly suggested a necromancer's cave to Edward's boyish imagination, stuffed as it was with all kinds of uncanny things—fossils, skeletons, minerals, insects, and odd bones, with unpleasant-looking bottles in which reptiles appeared to be writhing and turning.

A chair was with some difficulty cleared from the general overflow of papers, parchments and books, and placed opposite Mr. Rickman's own arm-chair, in which he sat, regarding his guest attentively and trying to remember if he had recently

applied to him on any subject connected with the house or land which he held of him. For Edward Annesley had for some months past been in undisputed possession of the Gledesworth estates, though there had at first been some difficulty in getting probate of Paul's will in consequence of the body not having been found. Gervase, however, had managed cleverly, so that the Gledesworth affairs had been settled in a surprisingly short time. His evidence as an eye-witness of the death had satisfied the Court of Probate, before which Edward Annesley had not been summoned.

A vague notion that rent must be due was the sole result of Mr. Rickman's mental interrogation, which continued for some seconds, while Annesley sat silent, looking down upon a pile of dusty volumes heaped pell-mell at his feet.

"I think, Mr. Rickman," he said at last, "that you are Miss Lingard's guardian."

"I am one of her trustees, I never was her guardian; she will soon be of age," he replied, surprised at the question.

"At all events," continued Annesley, "you stand in place of a father to her."

"She is my adopted child, Annesley," he replied; "she is the same to us as our own daughter—we have had her so long. I question whether the tie of consanguinity is as strong as is generally supposed. There is no trace of it in the lower animals; family feelings in man are the result of imagination, strengthened by religion, inherited social instincts, and above all of habit. Perhaps I may be permitted to observe——"

"And habit has made Miss Lingard your daughter, sir," interrupted Edward. "I need not tell you what my circumstances are, because you know. I came to tell you that I have long loved your adopted daughter, and desire your permission to pay my addresses to her."

"You wish," replied Mr. Rickman in extreme amazement, "to marry—Alice?"

"Yes. It seemed right to ask your permission before asking hers."

Mr. Rickman very deliberately removed his glasses, and, taking his handkerchief, began to polish them with extreme diligence. Having assured himself of their spotless brilliance, he replaced them at his eyes with accurate care and looked through them thoughtfully at his guest.

"My permission," he repeated with a troubled air—"my permission. My dear Mr. Annesley, this is a very great surprise to me—a very great surprise. I had understood—I had been led to

suppose—Ah! perhaps you are not aware that Miss Lingard's affections have already been given—your poor cousin."

Edward's face darkened, but his gaze met Mr. Rickman's steadily.

"Your poor cousin," continued Mr. Rickman, "had been paying his addresses to her for some time at the date of his death; I am told, with only too good success. Certainly the poor child has never been the same since."

"I know it," he replied, "and on that account do not expect to win her in a moment."

Mr. Rickman moved uneasily in his chair and looked out of the lattice window into the drooping gold splendour of a laburnum, and watched the languid flight of a bee humming about the blossom.

"I do not recommend you to prosecute the suit, Mr. Annesley," he said after a pause. "Alice is a woman of deep feeling; she will not forget her dead lover quickly, if at all. You will only waste time and hope."

"That is my concern," he returned. "The question is, have I your permission—have you anything to urge against me?"

As he said this, he looked so steadily and even sternly at Mr. Rickman, and his breath came so quickly through his nostrils above his close-shut lips, that the old gentleman's mild eyes quailed and fell, and he looked the picture of embarrassed misery, fidgeting on his chair as if it had been the gridiron of St. Lawrence, seeking words and finding none.

"Is there any reason why I may not ask Miss Lingard to be my wife?" repeated Edward sternly.

"My dear Edward," replied Mr. Rickman, driven to bay, "you must be aware that there is a—a certain stigma upon your name—a—a reproach."

"What reproach?" he demanded proudly.

"My dear Annesley, I believe you incapable of the wrong imputed to you, pray believe that. If I thought differently, of course I should not have received you at my house and allowed my family to enter yours. But you must acknowledge that such a stigma is a serious drawback."

"I acknowledge it," he replied.

"I think," continued Mr. Rickman, "that the stigma might be removed by the simple expedient of relating in detail all that you did on that unfortunate afternoon. There seems to be a hiatus in your narrative, which no doubt you could easily fill."

"You are mistaken, sir," he replied. "No words of mine could remove the stigma, such as it is. I could not fill the hiatus.

All I can do is to live it down, as I shall in time. I have a bitter enemy; who may repent. The question is, do you forbid me to ask your adopted child to marry me?"

"It is very sad," sighed Mr. Rickman, mournfully playing with a paper-knife. "Very sad. But I can scarcely venture to forbid you. I must refer you to Alice herself. I shall not forbid her, but should she seek counsel of me, I should certainly not advise her to marry a man who is—forgive me for saying what is no doubt too well known to you—ostracized by his class." But it was not the public ostracism which weighed most with Mr. Rickman; he thought that Edward owed a full explanation to the family into which he proposed to marry.

"If I am cut by the county," replied Edward, "I need not live at Gledesworth. I have already offered my mother and sisters the choice of any place they like to live in. We could let or leave Gledesworth. But the best plan for me is to stay and live it down. And my mother has agreed to stand by me and face it out."

"I have protested," said Mr. Rickman, with an air of relief, "according to my duty. I will say no more. (Besides," he reflected, "as she is certain not to accept him, it does not really matter whether I object or not.) I do not forbid your suit, but I warn you that it will not be successful. Under the circumstances, you are the last man to make Alice false to the memory of Paul Annesley."

Edward thanked him and rose to take leave of him. "You are very good to me, Mr. Rickman," he said, shaking his hand; "and though you do not encourage me, at least believe that I will do my best to be worthy of her."

"Don't go yet, they are all at home, I think," said Mr. Rickman, satisfied that he had fully done his duty in throwing all his faculties into the interests of every-day life for a time, and glad to retire mentally into his world of abstractions and theories once more; "let us go and find them."

Edward and Alice had scarcely met since Paul's death. On the rare occasions of his calling at Arden Manor, she had seldom appeared, and although she visited his mother and sisters at Gledesworth Park, her visits had occurred when he was away with his battery. Once or twice they had met in the street at Medington, where Alice often paid visits of weeks' duration to Mrs. Walter Annesley, who lived on still in her creeper-covered house in the High Street, though in greater state than of old; but they had not stopped to speak to each other, on account of Mrs. Annesley's presence. For Mrs. Annesley had refused to

meet any of the Gledesworth Annesleys since her son's death. She had been much discomposed at the readiness with which probate of her son's will had been granted by the Court. She complained to Gervase that Edward ought to have been summoned as a witness of the death. At which Gervase smiled mysteriously, and observed that it was unnecessary, since the Court entertained no suspicion that he had evidence to give. Only those present in court knew what Gervase's deposition was; the transaction was too unimportant to be published.

Once Alice, at Gervase's request, had attended a political meeting at which the county member addressed his constituents, previous to an election. Paul had then been dead about seven months, and Edward, over-persuaded by Gervase, had consented to make one of the party on the platform and deliver a brief speech if called upon to do so. Except the member and one or two inferior local politicians, no one there had appeared aware of his existence.

When it came to his turn to speak, he stood up and gazed with dim eyes and a whirling brain upon the unaccustomed sight of a sea of expectant human faces beneath him. He was too nervous to notice that the applause, which in some measure greeted the rising of every other speaker, and which in Gervase's case had been tumultuous, was not forthcoming for him, nor did his unaccustomed ear catch an ominous sibilation which grew into loud hisses. Once he had plunged into a burning house and rescued some sleeping children, rushing through a sheet of flame to what seemed certain death, with closed eyes, singeing hair and sobbing breath. With the same feeling of mortal agony and the same determined hardening of his heart he now plunged into the scorching flame of public speech, and was greatly surprised when his preliminary "Ladies and gentlemen" floated tranquilly through the building without provoking any convulsion of nature, or even bringing the roof down, and he said without hesitation or circumlocution that he approved of the programme just presented to them by their member. Having done this in about six words, he paused, reflecting that he might as well sit down, since he had nothing more to say, and wishing the others would be as expeditious, when the momentary silence was broken by the following sentence flung out in a high harsh voice from the back benches, "Who killed Paul Annesley?"

Cries of "Order!" and "Turn him out!" made a momentary confusion, and then Edward, roused to defiance, with the sweat standing on his face, began again, his nerves steadied by the spirit of battle, and dilated upon some detail of the member's

programme, interrupted by hisses, whistles and cries of "Cain!" "Cain!" until he had to sit down, at the instance of those near him, in spite of his fierce determination to face the matter out.

Gervase afterwards maintained that these cries came from purely Conservative sources, and were merely an attempt to obstruct and break up the Liberal meeting; but as the meeting passed off quietly after the police had forcibly ejected one or two ardent spirits, it was difficult to believe that the personality had only a political origin.

"He should have left the room," Alice said, discussing it afterwards.

"Oh, no!" objected Sibyl. "It was better to face it out, like the brave man he is."

"He will never again take an active part in local politics," commented Gervase. "I wish I had not advised him to begin so soon."

When Mrs. Walter Annesley heard of the occurrence, she laughed and observed that Heaven was just; but to Alice she said nothing, the two having agreed that Edward Annesley's name was not to be mentioned between them.

When Mr. Rickman conducted Edward from his study after their private interview, they found Alice and Sibyl in the garden behind the house, entertaining Horace Merton and his sister, a child of twelve, who had strolled in from the vicarage. The grey ridge of down had a solemn effect against the tranquil blue sky, and, but for the fulness of the leaves, the loss of the apple-bloom and the difference of the flowers bordering the broad turf walk, the scene was the same as on that April day the year before, when Paul and Edward had surprised each other there. The pungent fragrance of burning weeds helped the similitude, and the tall St. Joseph's lilies, with their dazzling white petals and hearts of virgin gold, stood as sentinels behind Alice, in place of the soldier-like narcissus, which had then poised their green lances and held their heads erect behind her.

Alice rose from the bench on which she was sitting and came to meet him; when she took his offered hand he looked in search of the old unspeakable something he had formerly seen there, but he found nothing save a settled sorrow in the glance that met his. His heart misgave him, and he knew that he must wait before he could win her; her loss was still too fresh. He sat there like one in a dream, gazing at the young people who were shooting at the target, and stroking the head Hubert laid on his knee, while Mrs. Rickman chatted tranquilly, and Gervase preluded upon his violin at a little distance, where he could see every-

body and watch them, thinking many thoughts which his music helped.

When Alice came to the tea-table Edward placed his chair for her and stood at her side, leaning against a tree, and began hoping that she would not fail to be one of the luncheon party at Gledesworth at the end of the week.

"If you do not come this time," he said in a low tone, so that others might not hear, "I shall begin to think you have some quarrel against me."

"Oh! Mr. Annesley," she replied earnestly, "pray do not think that."

"I have enemies," he continued in the same low voice. "I hope you are not among them. You promised once that you would be my friend, if you remember."

"And I am your friend," she replied, raising her eyes and speaking very clearly though softly and a little tremulously; "I could never be otherwise."

"Thank you," he replied, and he almost started when he discovered Gervase close at hand offering him a seat, to take which obliged him to leave Alice, since her chair was on the outside of the semicircle, and the only vacant chair was at the other end next Sibyl, who turned at his approach and welcomed him with her usual cordial smile.

"Do you *like* being in the army, Mr. Annesley?" asked little Kate Merton across the table all of a sudden, in a silence which followed some peaceful and common-place discussion.

"Naturally, Miss Kate. I entered the service of my own will," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Then how will you like having to leave it?" continued the child. "Papa says you were recommended to resign——"

"Kate, be quiet," muttered her brother, pinching her.

"Well, he did, Horace, you heard him," she went on, "and you said it was as good as being turned out."

"If ever I go out again with that brat!" thought Horace, trying to stop the child's tongue; but Edward would not have her quieted.

"You may tell your papa that I have not been recommended to resign," he said. "You need not scold your sister, Mr. Merton; she merely shows me what a very kind interest people take in my affairs," he added sarcastically.

After this the conversation was forced and spasmodic; Edward wondered if the fact of his having actually been recommended to leave the service by a brother officer of subaltern rank, as a means of escaping a coldness that threatened to grow into ostracism,

could possibly have become known, and so have given rise to this report.

He sat silent, with a gloomy face and eyes bent on the turf at his feet. Sibyl looked at him, the soft fire of her dark eyes clouded with pity, and the tenderest sympathy speaking from her face. Her father, usually so unobservant, surprised the look, and his own lined face softened. "What a pity!" he thought to himself, "my clever little Sib!" Gervase saw it and his face darkened; Alice saw nothing but the grass on which her eyes, like Edward's, were bent in silent melancholy. Then Edward looked up and caught the full stress of yearning compassion in Sibyl's guileless face and his heart was touched; for a sympathy so complete, so mute, and so impotent is rarely seen in a human face, but sometimes in a faithful animal's loving gaze. For an instant Sibyl's beautiful soul seemed to meet his and surprise him with its sweetness; then a ripple of laughter passed over her face, and she began to rally him on his melancholy. "We are all so dull and heavy to-night, there must be thunder in the air," she said. "Alice, do tell us how you went to the Dorcas meeting at Medington and how the curate came in to tea with the fifty Dorcas ladies. I often wonder what we should do if curates were abolished," she added. "There would be nothing to amuse people in little towns."

"Oh! this story is too humiliating to our poor sex," replied Alice, rousing herself from painful thought; "besides, I leave all the little malicious tales to you, Sibyl; no one can surpass you in that line."

"Unlucky curate, to fall into Sibbie's hands," commented Gervase.

But not even Sibyl's matchless description of the solitary and bashful curate having tea with fifty grimly virtuous ladies could beguile the heaviness from Edward Annesley's face, though he joined in the laughter it provoked; nor did all the merry discussions and illustrations of curate-worship as practised in the Anglican communion, which Gervase enriched by anecdotes, more amusing than authentic, appear to interest him.

Some haunting care embittered everything; he had the preoccupied look of a man who is perpetually remembering something he would like to forget.

CHAPTER III.

AT SUNSET.

THE Mertons left early, and Gervase Rickman looked at Edward, thinking he would follow them, which he did not. Mr. Rickman had long since vanished into the charmed privacy of his study, and Mrs. Rickman had gone in to avoid the dew, but sat at work in a window looking out on the garden.

"I must go to the shearers' supper," Gervase said at last. "Perhaps, Annesley, you would not care to look in as well. You would find the humours of a shear-feast stale?"

"Of course he would," Sibyl replied for him. "But I shall go and have my health drunk. Nonsense, Gervase, I shall go. You know I always look in for a minute. Come at once."

She took her brother's arm and bore him off protesting, laughingly, it is true, yet seriously annoyed with Sibyl for coming with him, and angry at Annesley's bad taste in remaining with Alice.

The shearers' supper was spread in the kitchen, a long, low, dark room with black oaken beams, filled now with the odour of hot food, the sound of knives and forks and human voices, and the Rembrandt shadows caused by the firelight playing on the mixture of dusk and steam.

Good ale and good beef had by this time brought the slow heavy machinery of rustic speech into full play. Raysh Squire was telling his best story: that of the smugglers hidden in a tomb, whose morning uprising from their hiding-place made some early labourers, going to their work, think the Last Day was come. John Nobbs had just brought forth a new and powerful joke, at the remembrance of which he still chuckled. He was considering which of his songs, "In the lowlands low," or "A gentle maiden, fair and young," he should sing. Sibyl would fain have lingered at this scene, the unsophisticated humours of which pleased her lively fancy, but after the singing of

"Here's a health unto our Meäster, the vounder of the veäst,"

Gervase insisted on her going.

She went out slowly, and leaving the house and garden passed

round by the barns, and strolled away in the balmy June gloaming, until she reached the belt of firs, the moaning music of which was now still for awhile; there she stopped and saw the first pale stars tremble into the transparent lemon-tinted sky.

She turned her face to the beautiful west, leant her arms upon the rail-fence, beyond which the shorn sheep were browsing with plaintive bleating and mellow bell-tinkling, and watched the familiar miracle of the star-rising with all the enthusiasm of romantic youth; her ardent imagination conjuring up visions and suggesting aspirations, hidden from others: for Sibyl had the sublime misfortune to be a poet, as if being a woman was not bad enough.

A nightingale's song, mellow, rich and turbulent, poured from a copse hard by, and the tears sprang to Sibyl's eyes.

"When the world is so beautiful," she mused, "and there is the hope of one still more beautiful, what can we want more?"

She fell into a train of thought, trying to find out and give expression to the broad general meaning of those confused and conflicting currents which make up the full stream of human life. The best thing in youth, next to its unspoiled capacity for enjoyment, is the limitless field of vision and conjecture which its dim future offers. Sibyl stood solitary and pensive in the summer twilight and mused upon human life, and her own little portion of it, trying to picture what the future might bring her, with an ardent face and infinite depths of thought in her dark eyes. She saw her parents bending under the burden of years, and clinging to her for support; she saw herself expressing thoughts which sometimes threatened to consume her, and establishing a subtle sympathy between herself and thousands of unknown souls. But one side of life might never fully be revealed to her, a whole sequence of joys and sorrows must be denied her, she could be only the spectator of the leading events in the drama of life. Thus, she reflected, she might get a truer image of the whole than if her vision were distorted by the storm and stress of personal experience. For some deep instinct made a fair unbroken view of life necessary to Sibyl.

So these thoughts came to her as she lingered beneath the firs, her bright face lifted to the sky and irradiated by its lustre; these and others too deep or too sad to be uttered.

In the meantime Edward found the opportunity he had so carefully sought. He was alone with Alice, whose spirit was stirred by the thought that a crisis in her life was approaching, and still more by the fear that she might be too weak to pass triumphantly through it. They strolled silently between the tall white sentinel lilies, the dazzling petals of which shone in glorious purity against

the green of the espaliers. Edward was too overcharged with feeling to speak, and his heart misgave him when he observed how changed Alice's face was since the day when first he saw it. If the face had been dear then, it was ten-fold dearer now, though the first glory of youth was gone and its early lustre dimmed. During the past months Alice had suffered a wearing, wasting pain, which he was far from divining, and the perpetual conflict, while marring the beauty of her face, had left its stamp in an ethereal charm only seen in those who, like Jacob, have wrestled spiritually and prevailed. The patriarch halted on his thigh after that night's wrestling. No one may issue alive unscarred from such conflict, and Alice never regained her youthful bloom. Her face was thin, her eyes were too bright. And though this suffering was, as he thought, for another, it endeared her to the man who loved her so truly.

Of late she had fought hard against the conclusion which had forced itself upon her by the river side. Whenever she saw Edward she could not accept the verdict her reason forced upon her. So it came to pass that her thoughts continually buffeted her and gave her no rest; she rose in the mornings burdened by the weight of another's guilt, and struggled mentally all the day, till at night she lay down with the hope that some misconception existed, and that a straightforward recital of all that occurred on that most unhappy afternoon would remove the stigma from Edward Annesley's name, only to rise and renew the conflict on the morrow. And to-day when he uttered those few words at the tea-table, his voice, the silent devotion in his manner, and the light in his eyes, stirred a new feeling in her, which should have been hope, but was fear. Till now she had not thought that he loved her; she had accepted Gervase's theory that his jealousy, unlike Paul's, was the evil fruit of a passing fancy. His very silence, as they paced the turf-walk in the balmy evening, told her more eloquently of his love than any speech; and the wild flutter of pulses within her told her too truly that she loved him in return.

After all she was the first to speak; the pent-up resolve to question him at all hazards breaking forth almost before she was aware of it.

"Mr. Annesley," she said gently and calmly, in spite of the thick heart-beats which nearly choked her, "I am glad to be alone with you for a moment. I wish to ask you a very serious question."—She stopped, facing him, and looked down on the grass at their feet, where the closed daisies really looked like pearls, *margaritæ*.—"You will perhaps think it impertinent."

"How could I?" he remonstrated, recovering from the first shock of surprise. "Any and every question you care to ask can be but an honour to me."

"You have asked me more than once to be your friend," she continued, "and in that name I venture to ask this, not from curiosity or any mean motive, but solely for your own sake."

"Dearest Miss Lingard, this is too good of you," he replied, when she paused at a loss for further speech. "I too have something to ask and something to say, but I will hear first," he said, smiling, "what your commands are."

Alice still looked down upon the closed heads of the daisies, her hands nervously locked together before her, her lips compressed, and her face full of feeling and purpose. The setting sun threw a glory upon her; swallows wheeled in the pure pale sky overhead; sheep-bells, farmyard sounds, birds' songs, and the voices of village children at play, came borne in softened tones upon the still evening air; opening roses, meadow clover, lily scents, and the vague perfume of the young foliage, breathed a charm of fragrance about the two lovers, to whom the whole earth seemed charged with the meaning and melody of ethereal-ized passion. Alice could scarcely find words to express her burning thoughts.

"You suffer," she said at last, "under an imputation—that is all the more terrible because it is so vague."

Edward started as if a hand of ice had been laid upon his heart; the whole world changed for him, the sunlight was grey, and the air lost its balm.

"Yes," he replied.

"I have thought," she went on, her heart beating still more rapidly, "much upon it. And I have thought that you might remove this—this reproach."

"I cannot," he replied, pale and agitated—"Alice, I cannot."

Alice's memory vibrated with the words she had heard in the pine-wood. "Promise that you will never tell.—All need never be known.—Above all *she* must never know." She knew now that she was the Helen of that fratricidal strife.

"Oh, do not say that!" she cried. "Surely, surely you should tell all that happened on that day. Perhaps, after all, you *have* told all?" she pleaded, pressing her hands together in the intensity of her hope. "Oh! you have told all, and what is rumoured of something concealed is only scandal," she urged, though his own words about concealment sounded in her memory, even as she spoke, like a funeral knell.

He turned away, and then he turned again and looked in her agitated face.

"You mean well, dearest Miss Lingard," he said, "but this discussion is as useless as it is painful. I can bear the burden, such as it is. I shall live it down. After all, what is the opinion of others?"

"Is my opinion nothing?" she asked.

"It is everything. Alice, Alice; think as kindly of me as you can. I love you, Alice, I loved you the first moment I saw you; do not mistrust me."

He had now taken her hands and obliged her to look at him, which she did through tears.

"Tell me the whole truth," she said.

"No, Alice; believe in me, but do not ask me this," he replied. "Of all people I can never tell *you* the story of that hour."

"Would it not ease your mind to speak freely to one who—who—who is your friend?" she continued, in a way that touched him.

"No," he answered; "no. It cannot be. I must ask you to bury this subject in your memory for ever. Dearest Alice, I know what sorrow fell upon you on that day. I have not spoken to you of my feelings since, because I respected your grief. But what is past is past, and cannot be changed, and you are young and without near ties. And I have loved you, faithfully and truly, ever since that day when I first saw you. And I came here to-day to ask you—not to be my wife—it is over-soon for you to think of that, but to begin a new life and think of my need of you, and let me see you from time to time and try to win you. When you know that my whole heart is bound up in you, will you not try to take me for your husband?"

Alice disengaged the hands he had been clasping in the growing intensity of his words, and stood a little farther from him, pausing before she replied, with a strong resolve to put away feeling and listen only to duty.

"Do you know what you are saying, Mr. Annesley?" she asked at last; "you come to me with a stain upon you, and you refuse to move it by an explanation."

"Time will efface that stain," he replied, shrinking slightly beneath her words, which cut him to the heart. "And though I am stout enough to face the world's scorn and bear the burden myself, I should never ask a wife to share it. I would ask her to leave this place and let me find her a home, where these rumours have not been heard. I know that this is a dis

advantage, but if love can atone for anything, my love is strong enough to atone for this. If you could once learn to love me, Alice, and you might in time, the world's opinion would weigh lightly with you."

She was dumb with amazement. The man who stood before her, exalted by honest feeling, his face earnest, and his voice eloquent with it, *could* not be guilty of what was imputed to him. Nor could he be a dissimulator. Her heart went out to him, she longed for mental blindness, she would have given half her life not to have overheard his compact with Gervase, or Gervase's subsequent hints. If she could but wipe that hour from her memory and trust him, as he expected her to trust him, then she could give herself to him with perfect unreserve and share the burden that was pressing so heavily upon him, with no reproach from her conscience.

"Mr. Annesley," she replied coldly at last, "you cannot love me if you do not trust me. And if you trusted me, you would confide your secret to me."

"My secret!" a red flash rushed over his face. "Why do you attribute a secret to *me?* I see that I can never win your love, since I have not won your trust."

He turned away, his face dark in the chill twilight, and the misery in it went to Alice's heart. "Let me trust you," she besought him, "tell me what foundation there is for these dark surmises. Believe me, Mr. Annesley, I should *like* to trust you," she added with a pathos which moved and yet gladdened him. Surely there was a little love in that beseeching voice, he thought, and he seemed to see it in the face upon which he turned to gaze in the pale twilight.

"Trust me," he said, his voice vibrating with strong feeling, "trust me perfectly with a large unquestioning trust. Remember, once for all, I *cannot* clear up this mystery. You do not know what you ask, or you would never ask it. Trust me."

Alice began to tremble again, and she clasped her hands together with a silent prayer for guidance. It would be so sweet to say "I trust you;" but, knowing what she knew, so wrong; the thing she was asked to condone was too terrible.

"No," she replied, "I cannot trust one who does not trust me."

He was silent and heart-struck. Once more he turned aside and gazed blankly away over the balmy garden, where the flowers poised their heads in a dreamy stillness that seemed to yearn for speech, and a brown mystery of shadow was being woven about the trees away to the firs, beneath which Sibyl was

standing unseen, to the meadows where the sheep were grazing tranquilly in the mystic gloaming, to the coppice from the green heart of which a nightingale was singing, to the hill dark against a sky bright with the after glow and pierced by a few pale faint stars.

"I do trust you, and I love you as I shall never love again," he said, after a brief, sharp spasm of pain, "but it is all over now. Only think as kindly as you can of me, Alice, and remember me when you want a friend."

He was going, but an overpowering impulse moved her to recall him.

"Stay," she cried, "do not go like this."

He came back quickly, took her hands, and spoke without reserve, wild words of passion.

"Hush!" she cried; "do not speak like that," and he was silent.

"Think it over," he said, presently, "I can wait. Say that I may come again later."

The apparition of Gervase at the end of the turf-walk made them start asunder, and they went to meet him, the agitation in their faces hidden by the friendly dusk. Gervase appeared surprised to see them. "I thought you had gone long ago, Annesley," he said, apparently untroubled by the thought that his company was superfluous. "What a charming night! Somebody said Sibyl was out here; have you seen her, Alice?"

"It is later than I thought," said Edward; "these long days deceive one. There is no real night."

"The moon will rise soon," returned Gervase; "you had better wait for her. I envy you your ride over the downs. When are you and I to have our moonlight stroll, Alice?"

"Not to-night," she replied, "I am tired." And when they reached the garden door, she vanished with a brief "good-night" into the shadowed house, responding by a slight inclination of the head to Edward's murmured injunction "Write."

Then he rode away in the dewy silence, and thought it all over with a heavy heart in which there glowed scarcely a spark of hope. Over the ghostly downs in the faint dusk and in the rising moonlight he rode, up and down and across for miles and miles, and every rood of land over which he rode was his own. He looked sadly at his fair inheritance sleeping tranquilly in the magical moonlight, woodland, farm and field spread over the undulating down land, and in the plain beneath; he would have given half his life to be free of it, for the price he had paid for it was too heavy. The face of Paul, as he had last seen it, dark with passion and bitter with mockery, floated before him ghostlike, and took the ethereal sweetness from the moonlight, and dimmed the glory of the calm

infinite night. He saw well that the dead Paul was as serious a barrier as the living one had been. Even if Alice recovered from her sorrow, this silence between them must ever keep them apart; since she did not trust him he could never hope to win her love.

While he rode away thus in the dim, summer night, the tranquil household at Arden quieted down, and when the family had retired for the night, Sibyl knocked at Alice's door and entered her room.

"Have you anything to say to me to-night?" she asked.

"Nothing," replied Alice, who was accustomed to this little formula, the prelude to some sisterly confidence; "have you anything to confess?"

"My sins have not been very black to-day," replied Sibyl, kissing her with unwonted tenderness, "but I thought—Alice, have you sent him away?"

Alice silently kissed her.

"All the world is against him," continued Sybil; "you should stand by his side."

Alice burst into tears and said nothing.

"Is it because you believe these hateful scandals?" Sibyl went on. "Surely you cannot think there is any truth in them?"

"I think," said Alice, lifting her head from Sibyl's shoulder, "that he ought to clear himself."

"How could he?"

"He should make a full and clear statement of all that he did that afternoon."

"Yes. And publish it in the papers, and make the town-crier proclaim it in Medington streets," retorted Sibyl, scornfully, "and who would believe it?"

It had not occurred to Alice before that he could not now clear himself; that the more he noticed the vague accusations lodged against him, the more substance they would take; that nothing short of a public trial, with its formal charges and formal refutation of them, ending in an acquittal, could efface the stain upon him. If a man is said to be an untrustworthy man, it is impossible to disprove the charge; if he is accused of forgery, he cannot be held guilty until the charge is supported by reliable evidence. No special accusation could be brought against Edward Annesley, the worst that was urged against him was matter of surmise at the most. The case stood thus: the cousins had quarrelled, and it was known that they had been near each other, if not together, within a few minutes of the violent death of one; it was not known where the survivor was at the moment of the accident, the fatal termination of which only was witnessed by a

third person. The death was of great advantage to the survivor, the motive for crime was present. The fact that the dead man's mother refused to meet his heir and her nearest kinsman was impressive. How all this was known, and how all these surmises and conjectures had been built upon the foundation of facts known only to a few persons, and occurring in a foreign country, was a mystery that Edward Annesley and his friends vainly attempted to solve.

"He must have some deadly enemy," Sibyl had said once, whereupon Gervase advised her not to repeat that observation.

"If you wish to ruin a person's reputation," he added, "the best way is to lay some charge against him that admits no disproof and get it well talked about."

"True," replied Mr. Rickman, who was present, "a germ of fact infinitesimal in magnitude, accompanied by a certain bias, when passed through the minds and mouths of numerous narrators, develops to enormous and unexpected proportions. Each narrator adds from a defective or careless memory; hearsays are reported as witnessed facts; imagination supplies gaps and enhances details, because the innate artistic feeling of mankind demands a properly proportioned story. A savage performs some isolated feat of endurance, he develops into a hero; the deeds of several such heroes, are in the course of time attributed to one, whose actions gradually become miraculous, until in the course of ages the brave savage is a god. Such are myths, such is the legendary dawn of history."

These words Alice remembered now, acknowledging their justice, and bitterly regretting and censuring the concealment, which she thought the cause of the whole imbroglio.

Better, far better for Edward, she thought, it would have been, had he given himself up to the Cantonal authorities as having been the accidental cause of his cousin's death, if, as she supposed, that death had occurred in the course of a quarrel or struggle in which both had forgotten the dangerous nature of the ground on which they stood. If, as she had often hoped, Edward had merely witnessed the accident, why did he not report what he saw? why was there any concealment? was he afraid of attaching suspicion or blame to himself? Was he, in short, a coward?

"After all," said Sibyl, at the end of their conference in Alice's chamber that night, "what do these calumnies matter? They naturally pain him. But he will soon live them down." Which was but an echo of Edward's words in the garden that night, Alice reflected, as the door closed upon Sibyl, and left her to the unwelcome companionship of her own thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFLICT.

SIBYL'S reasoning could not quiet the fever in Alice's breast. The words Edward Annesley had used on the fatal afternoon when he implored Gervase's silence, rang in her ears and would ring for ever, and the *edelweiss* she had seen in his hat was always bearing witness against him. How could the cousins have exchanged hats? and why did Edward remove the *edelweiss* as soon as he perceived it? The only solution was that he had had some part in the accident, involving the temporary loss of his own hat as well as of Paul's, and had taken Paul's by mistake. It was still possible that Edward's part in the accident was innocent, or, at least unintentional; Paul might have been the aggressor; but if Edward's part was innocent, why did he conceal it? Ah! why? was the weary burden of the perpetual strife within her.

Few things were more hateful to Alice in the proud purity of her own transparent truthfulness than anything approaching to deceit. It was painful to her to have to withhold the most innocent truth. She could not conceive, in the noble simplicity of her nature, that an honourable man could be ashamed to publish any incident in his life. She could not respect a man with any such concealment. Yet she loved him; she would willingly have yielded up her life if she could but see the veil lifted, and Edward's honour and integrity shining clear and unsullied behind it.

There was no rest for her that night; she knew that a worse conflict than any she had yet endured must be struggled through before dawn. She said her usual prayers mechanically, she could not drive the one subject from her thoughts, and then she sent up that inarticulate cry for help, which the soul utters in its extremity, and which is more eloquent, or at least more earnest, than any syllabled prayer.

The moon had risen and the night was warm and still. Alice wanted air, the anguish within her bid fair to stifle her. She extinguished her lights and sat by the open lattice, gazing out into the vast calm night, wrestling inwardly, half in prayer, half in thought. Sibyl came back on some trivial errand and saw her

sitting there, pale and statuesque, shrouded from head to foot in a luminous veil of moon-beams, her head resting on her hand, her gaze directed to the pale pure sky, which was studded with celestial watch-fires made faint by the white moonlight. The girls knew each other's moods, and Sibyl withdrew, aware that it was useless to say anything. Her heart ached for Alice; she carried the picture of the still and suffering figure traced upon the night's faint darkness, and etherealized by the fairy web of white rays woven about her, into the perplexed wonderland of her own fantastic dreams.

Over and over again did Alice argue the case for the prosecution and that for the defence, with varying but always unsatisfactory verdict. What steeled her heart most against Edward was the fact of his enjoying Paul's inheritance. If some angry or accidental violence on his part had caused his cousin's death, surely he might renounce the fruits of that death, he might make over the property to his next brother, at least. But no, he enjoyed the land without apparent remorse, and now he wished to take the lady as well. If he came to her, penitent and unhappy, she would gladly throw in her lot with his, loyally sharing the burden and the bitterness, and helping him retrieve the past.

Even now there were moments when her heart so yearned over him that she felt that love must be paramount to everything —she must close her eyes on what she was not supposed to know, and make the best of what remained of his stained life, trusting him with the large generous trust he had asked of her, and evoking the better soul in the man who, as she knew, loved her deeply. As his wife he would perhaps confide in her, and she would help him make such atonement as was possible, loyally sharing his reproach. But then the horror of this secret rushed upon her soul, and she felt that to marry one to whom she imputed things so dark, would be to share in his sin: such a union could never be blessed of Heaven or bring any happiness to either of them. She thought of children who would inherit a curse, and to whom she would fear to speak of their father's life. She saw darkness standing for ever between them, an impassable barrier; she saw the years passing on and making the confession harder and harder. She thought of Paul's desolate mother, childless in her lonely old age, bereft of the one son she had so passionately loved, and in him of all the joy of her widowed life. It would be treason to her to link her lot with Edward's. She had been much with Mrs. Annesley of late, and the desolate woman had grown very dear to Alice's filial heart. She never repeated her first accusation of her nephew to Alice, but her silence with regard to him was

terribly eloquent. She clung to Alice and to no one else, and besought her not to leave her; she was the only comfort left her, she told her again and again.

After all, Edward had enough without her; he had youth, health, and friends, and the wealth and position that would in time attract more; for no doubt, as he said, he would live these slanders down. He might indeed have such pangs of conscience as would take the lustre out of the very sunlight. Yet when his face rose before her in all the reproach of its earnest honest love, as she had seen it in the garden that night, she could not attribute any wrong to him. Then recurred the old monotonous burden, why, why did he conceal anything? Surely if he sought her as his wife, he owed it to her to keep back nothing of his past; to demand that large generous trust was an insult. No; with that reserve he could not love her truly and trustfully. The world's verdict was nothing if she could but strangle the serpent of doubt which gnawed so incessantly upon her heart.

She looked down into the quiet garden, where they had walked in the evening dews, when he told her the old tale that every woman loves to hear and yearns to respond to; she thought of his coming on that early spring day when she sat among her flowers and looked up and loved him, and felt that he loved her, before there was time to reflect; she knew that she must love him for ever and ever, and that without him she could know nothing of the joy and beauty of life. She could not give him up, she was too weak; it seemed as if her frail being must be rent asunder in the struggle.

So she thought, over and over again, praying for guidance, while the hours went on.

Presently she saw the pencil of rays which streamed from Gervase's chamber window, showing he was busy within, vanish, and she knew that all the house was asleep and silent as death. The tall eight-day clock ticked loudly in its oaken case in the hall, like a living pulse of family life; it chimed hour after hour in its friendly familiar voice; she remembered how she had listened to it in the silence of the first forlorn night she passed, a friendless child, beneath the roof which had since sheltered her so warmly. She thought of all their kindness, and the little she had ever been able to do for them in return. She remembered Gervase's love, which he had so generously conquered; why could she not have loved him? She had taken Sibyl's lover from her, she had blighted Paul's life, she had brought she knew not what between the cousins, probably had been the cause of Paul's death; why had she been made the unwilling instrument of so much trouble?

She would at least try to do well. She took counsel of the quiet night, the deep serene silence sank like balm into her soul; the pale pure stars spoke peace to her troubled breast. The shrouding moonshine slanted and glided gradually away from her window, leaving her in the soft shadows.

The flowers slept in the garden beneath; friendly Hubert slept his watchful dog-sleep at her door; the horses were quiet in their stalls, the rattle of a halter or the stamp of a hoof was too far off to be heard even through that throbbing silence; the cocks and hens were all still on their perches; the sheep and cattle grazed so quietly in the distant meadows, they scarcely seemed to move; a wind, which woke and sighed through the balmy foliage of the new-leaved trees, died away; the nightingale's song had ceased suddenly long ago; only the weird occasional creaking of furniture, the rustle of some night-creature through the grass, and the strange rhythmic long-drawn breathing which vibrates through solitary nights, like sleep's self made audible, emphasized the deep silence, while the scent of the dewy earth and drenched grass, the sweetness of the tall lilies, white in the summer darkness, and all the fragrance of green and growing things filled it with balm.

Stars set, the moon had glided ghost-like away behind the down, a cock crew, a fresh breeze awoke, a pale greyness stole into the eastern sky and chilled the stars, and still Alice sat statue-like at the open lattice, resolute to wrestle once for all to the very death with the question which so tortured her; resolute also to decide once for all whether she ought to accept or refuse the only chance of happiness life offered her, whether it was her duty to give life-long pain or pleasure to one whose happiness was dearer to her than life.

Her face grew sharp and pinched in the grey pallor of the early dawn; for the inward struggle grew fiercer as the hours went on; the sweet deep silence which was so helpful to her would soon be broken by all the voices of the woods and fields; the sun would soon strike upon the earth and dissipate the friendly veil of darkness and lay her trouble bare; she must decide quickly. Doubt is the most dreadful torture the soul can endure, especially doubt of those we love; there were moments in that night of bitter conflict when it would have been comparative happiness to Alice to have her worst fears for Edward confirmed. In that case she saw herself in imagination at his side, in some vague way helping and healing him; a seductive vision. Had he come to her, suffering, needing her, she must have taken him.

Her mother's face floated before her. Scenes from childhood came back, casting strong lights and shadows on her father's

unworthiness and her mother's misery. Her resolve was made; she would give Edward up. Then the conviction of his integrity darted arrow-like into her soul, and the struggle began once more. For if he were indeed guiltless she would be doing him a terrible injustice in refusing him. She had long ceased to think of the consequences to herself, she considered only what she owed to Heaven and the man who had placed his happiness in her hands.

Again the cock crew; the brooding greyness of the approaching dawn grew more intense; a bird stirred; a sort of grim ghastliness fell upon everything; the tall lilies shook on their stems, and were lost in the blurred shadow; a perceptible shudder passed over the earth, and many stars vanished from the sky.

Something cold touched the hand Alice laid on the window-ledge; it was the key of the vestry which was lent her that she might pass in and out of the church to play the organ. She took it up, and throwing a shawl over her head and shoulders, glided softly down the stairs, and, noiselessly sliding back the bolts of the garden-door, stole out into the grey garden. A lark shot up unseen into the dim sky, and broke the shadowy stillness with a thin strain of song; other birds woke, and filled the air with faint half-forlorn pipings and chirpings; there was a sort of trouble in the air and in their voices; they had not yet courage for full song —they hoped for the cheerful sun-rising, but were by no means sure that it would truly come.

Every object was now distinct in the grey blankness which seemed but a mockery of life and light—distinct, and yet quite different to what it was in the familiar, comfortable light of day. The house looked ghostly with its blinded windows, it was so still and lifeless; every cottage had a deserted, death-like aspect; every chimney was smokeless; it was hard to believe that anything human was near, and yet the thought of well-known faces blind with sleep beneath those thatched eaves intensified the solitude.

She passed through the garden and meadow by the rick-yard, gathering her skirts about her to avoid the drenching dew, along behind the quiet cottages and the inn with its row of sycamores, till she reached another village, scarcely more silent than that beneath the thatched roofs below—the village of the dead, whose narrow homes clustered even more closely than the others about the hallowed walls of the ancient church. For these the sun would rise in vain, bringing no joy, nor any trouble or temptation, perplexity or strife.

A golden warmth stole into the grey world as she walked on, and when she passed through the churchyard wicket there was a great change. The square tower, with its wide buttresses, lost its

hue of solemn grey, and all the hoary walls glowed rosy red; the sky was one rose, glowing most deeply on the horizon, and paling at the zenith; the last star faded in the universal blush; the grass of the churchyard, the fields and woods, the stern grey ridge of down, the village with its smokeless chimneys, were all bathed in crimson radiance; the heart of nature was deeply stirred; the very leaves thrilled in the roselight, and the birds burst into full song.

She entered the silent, shadowy church; her light steps sent echoes rustling among the heavy arches and dark roof; by contrast with the external rosiness, if was night within; the pillars gleamed ghostly in the stillness; the marble Annesleys praying silently on their tombs were pale shadows in hearts of darkness.

The empty church always had a deep impressive charm for Alice; she had often been there before to pray and meditate. The solemn beauty of the ancient building, its sacred associations, the thought that for centuries those hoary walls and massive arches had heard nothing but holy music and words of prayer and praise, the solemn vows of life's most sacred moments, words of hope for the dead, and exhortation and comfort for the living; all these things lifted up her heart, dissipated the lower elements of life, and heightened the spiritual. Such light as there was in the church was gathered in the chancel beneath the east window, in which apostles and angels were beginning to live beneath the warm touches of the dawn. Here Alice knelt and poured out her soul in supplication, so that it seemed as if in comparison she had never prayed before.

Here she had knelt with Sibyl in their dawning womanhood at confirmation, and felt the majesty and meaning of a life linked with the divine. Here the heavenly symbols had been dealt to her and her adopted parents time after time; here the very air seemed to thrill with high resolve and holy aspiration, and the faces of the pictured angels, growing more distinct with the growing light over the altar, were full of encouragement and consolation.

Those untiring choristers, the swallows, made their sun-lit matins audible in the still, echoing aisles, bringing sweet associations of peaceful summer Sundays. All the angels and apostles in the east window were now distinct, their rich-hued raiment and aureoles glowed jewel-like in the sunshine, which sent long shafts of colour upwards into the chancel-roof and athwart the stone arches, touching one of the silent, praying Annesleys till his marble mail burned with warm radiance.

A vision of a marriage rose before her. The usual worshippers filled the empty church, the priest stood white-robed in the chancel, and uttered the solemn words, "I charge you both as ye

shall answer at the great and dreadful day of judgment,"—the Annesleys were there, and the Rickmans, with the unseen witnesses of the spirit world, all listening, while she and Edward stood mute. The vision faded, the dead arose and thronged the air with spirit life; Paul Annesley, pale and troubled from his last agony, gazed upon her and the secrets of all hearts were revealed.

When an hour had passed, she rose and left the church, her resolution strengthened by a vow, unheard by any human ears save her own, which tingled at the sound of her voice multiplied in muffled echoes through the silent church.

The sun had risen upon the earth when she came out into the fresh purity of the dewy morning; the faithful Hubert rose from his recumbent watch across the vestry threshold, and dropped quietly behind her with a look of unobtrusive sympathy which went to her heart; the village was still sleeping in the pure sunlight, though here and there labourers were faring forth, heavy-footed, to their work; the dew lay deep on the herbage, every blade of grass was so weighted and studded with jewels it seemed a marvel that it did not break; the wine-like air was filled with stimulating flower-scents. Alice passed swiftly on, lifted up in heart, touched by the beauty and purity of the sunny morning and comforted by the clear singing of the birds. She paused by Ellen Gale's grave and removed some faded flowers her own hands had laid there, and thought of the day when she sat by her bedside, and Edward's cheerful song came through the open lattice and stirred her so strangely. Was she wronging him, after all?

Though, once for all, she had decided not to accept his offered love, and with that decision peace had come, she felt that the terrible doubt would never be solved, but would gnaw her heart continually, until the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. She remembered his words in the garden the night before, and realized that nothing would move him from his resolve to keep his secret, whether guilty or guiltless.

All was silent in Raysh Squire's cottage by the churchyard gate; no one had as yet stirred in the Golden Horse beneath, where the sunbeams were entangled in the tops of the sycamores; but in the meadow, where the sheep were lying down in expectation of a fair day, Daniel Pink was abroad tending his flock. The sight of the shepherd always brought spiritual strength to Alice; she knew more of his inward life than any other human being did, and reverenced the simple swain as she reverenced no other man. A little surprised to see her abroad so early, he looked up in answer to her greeting with something of the same feeling for her that she had for him. Alice's face was pale and transparent,

and her eyes were full of unearthly fire, the shawl she had thrown about her was white; it seemed to the shepherd as if some pure spiritual presence were passing before him in the quiet morning.

She reached the garden-door unseen, though the carters were already busy with the horses, and John Nobbs was standing sturdy in the yard, with loud voice setting the men on to work, and stole unperceived through the still sleeping house and was soon in bed and asleep.

When she woke, it was to feel a kiss on her face, and to see Sibyl standing dressed by her side with the news that breakfast was over.

"Gervase sent these with his love," she added, pressing a bunch of freshly blown tea-roses to her burning cheek; "he was sorry to have to go to business without wishing you 'Good-morning.'"

CHAPTER V.

A VERDICT.

THE thick-moted sunbeams of a June mid-day fell broadly through the windows of Whewell and Rickman's offices, scorning the flimsy screen of the dingy white blinds, rejoicing the companies of flies buzzing drowsily in complex evolutions through the thick air, and making those clerks swear whose desks were not in the shadow; they poured in a broad stream of light into Gervase Rickman's private room, where he sat at his writing-table out of their range, and commanded a view of the busy street beneath.

Sheets of paper covered with figures lay before him; he had been at work for an hour and more solving complex arithmetical problems, deduced from various documents scattered here and there; the final result of his calculations was eminently satisfactory, though he looked pale and exhausted as well as relieved, like one just delivered from great peril.

"Of one thing I am quite resolved," he said to himself, lifting his face from the papers and leaning back in his chair, "never again will I speculate with other people's money—at least not in large sums—it is too risky."

Only two days before he had been appalled by the receipt of a telegram from a trusty hand in the East to the effect that the hitherto rapidly rising Chinese Chin-Luns in which he had largely invested were about to fall heavily, and an expression unintelligible to any but himself at the end of the despatch told him they would soon be worthless. He instantly telegraphed to his broker to sell the whole of his Chinese stock; next day he received a telegram to say that the sale was effected at a high though lowered price. Then he breathed freely, satisfied at having doubled his capital, in spite of all. And now the morning papers announced a fall in Chin-Luns heavy enough to have absorbed half his invested money; to-morrow's quotations he knew would be lower; he had only been just in time.

The Chin-Luns were not the only perilous stocks in which he had speculated; they serve as a specimen of the terribly exciting game Gervase Rickman was playing, a game as dependent on

chance as any played over green cloth, and yet, like those, subject to certain laws, and capable of occasionally yielding satisfactory results to a player of iron nerve, and cool and steady brain. By constantly and closely watching commercial and political affairs; by dint of information which he managed to obtain from all sorts of unsuspected channels and which he never hesitated to act upon; by a keen insight into men and affairs which amounted to genius, together with a great capacity for calculating and combining, and educing order from chaos, and a courage that nothing could daunt, this hard-headed young man, resolutely following the noble maxim of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, had, in spite of many a hair-breadth escape from ruin, doubled and quadrupled his capital in the brief course of a few years. His face wore a triumphant expression as he sat at his writing-table and looked at the final result of the complicated network of investments which he was carrying on, suspected by few, and fully known to nobody.

A newspaper lay on the table; his eye caught the leading points of a criminal trial recorded in the uppermost columns, and he smiled an indulgent, half-pitying smile, such a smile as a skilful artist may accord to the failure of a beginner. "What a number of fools there are in the world," he thought, "unconscious fools, who blunder themselves into the grip of the law, thinking themselves capable!" He hastily glanced through the case, that of a lawyer who had speculated with trust-money and lost it, then he tossed the paper aside, and began pondering the question of re-investments for the Chin-Lun funds.

It really went to his heart to have to give such low interest to Alice Lingard after having doubled her money; but he could not give more than the interest legal for trust-money, and after all it would come to the same in the end; was it not all for her? He thought of others whose money had been the golden seed for his rich harvest, widows and orphans among them; and quieted certain faint qualms of what still remained of his conscience by reflecting that all the strictest justice required of him was to return them their capital with fair interest. It is no doubt a fine thing, he considered, for lawyers to manage the affairs of incapables, and take care of their money for them; but then lawyers must live. He was a remarkably clever young man, and, as he frequently thought, it was really a great pity that talents so brilliant and a courage so magnificent were not employed in the direction of large national, even European affairs; a lawyer's office was too narrow a cell for capabilities like his, they could not expand and develop as they ought to.

"Soon," he reflected, "if I do not break—and I *will* not—I shall have enough."

This saying alone proved him to be a remarkable man. How often does one meet with a human being who knows a limit to his desire for wealth, especially one who has tasted the fierce rapture of gambling? But Gervase Rickman was no money worshipper; he desired wealth only as a stepping-stone to power; nor was he a slave to the passion of gambling, had he been so, he would never have kept the cool brain necessary to a winner.

"I do wonder, Rickman," said his new partner, Mr. Daish, one day, "that with your capacity for public life you are not more ambitious."

"Do you?" returned Rickman sweetly. "Well, it is no doubt a fine thing to be Mayor of Medington, but I think Davis will make a better Mayor than I should." So Dr. Davis was elected to the municipal vacancy Mr. Daish wished his partner to fill, and Gervase Rickman saw him march to the parish church in a black silk gown trimmed with blue velvet behind the Mayor in scarlet and fur, and thought how funny Mr. Daish's notions of ambition were, Mr. Daish, who knew what an immense practice Whewell and Rickman's was, so immense that, in spite of the addition of one partner to the firm, they were about to give up the affairs of the Gledesworth estate. Yet the financial crisis, or rather crises, through which Gervase Rickman had just passed, coming as it did so shortly before that day of reckoning, Alice Lingard's twenty-first birthday, shook even his iron nerves, so that he rose to leave his office for luncheon at an unusually early hour, feeling an unwonted lassitude and distaste for work, and strolled quietly along the shady side of the streets till he came quite suddenly upon a rustic lane with a mill and bridge, under which a clear deep stream flowed tranquilly, shadowed by the green gloom of over-arching trees.

Here he rested, leaning on a rail and letting his thoughts wander at will with the quiet flow of the waters, as thoughts will wander, borne peacefully upon a passing stream. The water made the sole barrier between the road and an orchard which sloped from a gentle rise down to the verge, grassy, cool and fresh, full of the quiet lights which fall at mid-day through summer trees, and rest upon brown trunks and green grass.

But he could not find the mental repose he sought by the water-side; something which had passed between himself and Alice Lingard a day or two before came and troubled him, satisfactory as on the whole he considered it.

It was the day after Edward Annesley's visit to the Manor,

and Gervase had ridden over in the evening, to look, he said, to the marking of the shorn sheep, but really to see how Alice, whom he had missed in the morning, was faring.

Of late Alice had drawn closer to him, completely set at rest by the perfect way in which he cloaked the true nature of his feelings towards her, and referring to him in every little doubt and difficulty as she did to no one else. Much as she loved her adopted father and mother, she relied little upon them; her nature was stronger than theirs, and she unconsciously regarded herself as a stay to them, and did not look to them for support. Sibyl was her companion and beloved sister, but a sister, however dear, is not a brother, which Gervase was and proved himself in a thousand unobtrusive ways.

He told Sibyl that he wanted to be alone with Alice that evening, and Sibyl, accustomed to confer privately with him herself, thought this perfectly natural; she therefore soon found an excuse for leaving them to the quiet stroll Gervase proposed, and he and Alice walked on tranquilly alone together in the cool hush of the evening.

"What is it?" he asked quietly, when their desultory talk had come to an end, and they were resting half-way up the down against a gate.

Alice did not answer for a few minutes, but gazed on silently at the house and church lying beneath them in the last rays of evening.

"Wouldn't it be a relief to speak?" he continued, after a little. "You are pale and worn, you look as if you had had no sleep; something is worrying you."

"Yes," she replied, "you read one too well, Gervase; I *am* worried, but—no matter. It will pass."

He considered her thoughtfully for a little while, drawing his inferences. "A girl of your age," he continued, "ought to have no worries. Perhaps, after all, it is something that two words would set right."

"No," she replied, "nothing will ever set this right." Slow tears rose to her eyes, and fell on the rough wood of the gate on which her arms rested, and the tears went to his heart.

"Come, my dear child," he said, almost roughly, "this won't do. This is not like you, Alice."

"Oh, Gervase!" she cried, "you were always a good brother to me," and she turned to him and bent her head till her forehead touched his shoulder and rested there.

He summoned all his strength to resist the feelings stirred by that light touch; to yield now to one impulse would be fatal, the

impulse to fold the graceful burden stayed thus lightly upon him to his heart, and though he trembled slightly he did not move a muscle. It was but a moment that Alice leant against the strong arm, feeling an indescribable accession of moral support from the momentary contact, then she lifted her head, and the wild throbbing within him, of which she was so unconscious, quieted down, and Gervase's invincible will resumed its undisputed sway.

She looked up in his face with childlike confidence, and asked herself why she should bear a crushing burden alone, when she had so true and strong a friend to share it with her; Gervase answered her appealing look with a reassuring smile.

"I have no brother of my own," she continued, "and neither father nor mother to consult, and I have had to make a decision —and—I am not quite sure if I have done right."

She had done it, then; a weight was lifted off his heart, and he smiled more paternally than before.

"My dear child," he returned, "I have no doubt that you have acted wisely and well, but the wisest of us need a little friendly counsel at times."

"And besides the confidence I have in you," she added, "there is no one so fitted by circumstances to advise me upon this subject."

"No? That is a good thing."

"Gervase," she said, in the low tones of intense feeling, "I was under the trees by the river that afternoon—I had been asleep. I overheard what you and Edward Annesley said."

Gervase was startled for a moment from his self-control; all the blood rushed to his heart and he gazed half-terrified upon her, wondering what she could have heard, and trying to recall the exact circumstances of their meeting, and the words of the conversation.

"I heard your promise," she continued, "and I will not ask you to break it, but I will ask you this. Because of what occurred that day, and for no other reason, I refused to-day to marry Edward Annesley. Was I right?"

He did not answer for awhile, all the sunny peaceful fields whirled before his eyes, his head throbbed. Had he known that she would put this terribly direct question to him he would never have risked being alone with her. He looked at her earnest face, worn by inward suffering and noble with pure and loyal feeling, and felt that never before had she been so dear to him as now, while she was thus guilelessly confiding to his ears her love for another man. In a dim way he realized the depth and beauty of that love, such a love as he could never hope to win.

He knew that he held Alice's happiness in his hands, that the whole of her future life depended upon the next words he should say, and his heart was rent asunder with conflicting feelings. It would be sweet to make her happy, to see her face lighten and brighten and break into perfect joy at his words: that would be better than any more selfish satisfaction that might come from making her his own.

"Oh, Alice!" he faltered, lifted above himself for a moment by the purifying passion of his love, oblivious of self, desiring nothing but the good of the guileless being whose moral beauty had so conquered him, "Alice!"

Yet he paused, true to his cautious character, before yielding to his higher nature and irrevocably changing the course of their lives, and the pause, as such pauses are, was fatal. All his life, with its aims, ambitions and strong purposes, flashed before him in a moment of time—for the Tempter exercises a strong necromancy over those who palter with their better impulses, and crushes a life-time of thought and feeling into a moment—he thought of the long years during which his heart had been wasting in patient love for Alice with a deep self-pity, and he shuddered to think how black and unbearable the future would be without her. Then the second strong feeling of his heart, his love for Sibyl, appealed to him along with more selfish passions; all her life, so closely bound up in his own, came before him from her babyhood till now, and that subtle something within us which twists everything to selfish ends and justifies our evil wishes, persuaded him that Sibyl's interests, rather than his own, were at stake. He recalled his sorrow when she lay as a child at the point of death, and they told him she must die; he remembered how he prayed, as he had never prayed before or since—prayer was a long disused habit with him;—how he nursed her, feeling as if his strong affection had wrested her from the jaws of death. He thought with tender pride of her beauty and talents, and he thought of her face the evening before, when she looked upon Edward in his trouble; Sibyl must be happy at any cost. So he resolved.

Alice interpreted his apparent agitation with a sinking heart, she scarcely now needed words to confirm her worst fears. "Was I right?" she repeated.

There was a singing in his ears, his lips were so dry that he could scarcely speak; he paused again, and at last said in a voice that sounded strange and harsh to both of them, "Quite right."

Alice made no reply, but the look in her face was one he never could forget, and the tones of his own voice rang hauntingly in the ears of his memory long after, lowly as they were spoken.

"Quite right," echoed the harsh voice of the corncrake in the evening stillness. "Quite right," cawed the long string of rooks, proceeding solemnly homewards, dark specks against the pure sky. "Quite right," tingled the bells of the browsing sheep on the down above. "Quite right," murmured the rhythmic beat of his own heart, till the words, simple and few as they were, became meaningless by repetition, and yet more dreadful. To Alice, resting on the gate, with bowed head and averted face, they were the final knell of all that made life dear.

After some minutes of painful silence, Alice lifted her head, and the rose-light of the setting sun struck full upon the marble calm of her face, enhancing and still further spiritualizing its already spiritual beauty.

"Dear Gervase," she said, with the indescribable smile which comes from the depths of suffering, "you will never again refer to this."

"Never again," he murmured.

"Shall we go just to the crest of the hill?" she added; and they strolled tranquilly on, occasionally talking upon homely trivial subjects.

As this scene recurred to Gervase in the noonday shadows by the cool stream, with Alice's sorrow-stricken face seeming to gaze from the water's green depths, and his own words, "Quite right," ringing through the chambers of his memory, he felt that it had shaken him even more than the anxiety of the last few days, severe as that had been. Had he not escaped that danger, he would have had an agreeable birthday present to give Alice in the shape of a blank cheque representing the whole of her fortune, together with the appearance of his own name in the gazette; but he was too well used to narrow escapes and too sane of mind to dwell upon a past danger. The thought of the suffering he had inflicted upon her was another thing; it haunted him and refused to set him free; it came between him and his work; it spoilt his splendid nerve and daunted his magnificent audacity.

When the vision of Alice's sorrowful face became too insistent, he summoned another, that of Sibyl in the garden, gazing upon Edward's gloom. If he remembered too keenly the light pressure of Alice's brow on his shoulder when she sought counsel and comfort of him, he recalled the evening, more than a year ago, of Reginald Annesley's funeral, and pictured the sweet face of Sibyl wet with tears, when he asked what ailed her, knowing only too well, and she replied that his music was too mournful. Dear little Sibyl! How was it possible to see her and not love her?

There was little comfort to be got out of the green coolness by

the mill-stream that day, and after a brief pause there, he turned, and retracing his steps through the lane, emerged into the broad sunshine and comparative bustle of the High Street, down the shadiest side of which he passed slowly till he came to Mrs. Annesley's house, shrouded in its cool green veil of Virginia creeper, and presenting a refreshing contrast to the baked red bricks and glaring stucco of the houses on either side of it.

Here he crossed over into the sunshine, just as the door opened, and the well-known figure of the Vicar of Medington issued from it and paused at the foot of the steps.

"Are you going in, Mr. Rickman?" the doctor asked, while the servant waited, holding the door open. "You will find dear Mrs. Annesley brave and patient as usual. Such a truly religious woman! When one thinks what she has gone through, one can but wonder and admire."

"Yes," returned Gervase, "she has gone through a good deal, poor woman!".

"She forgets her own trouble in the sorrows of others," continued the doctor. "I did but mention the case of that poor Jones who was killed by the breaking of a crane on the quay last week, leaving a widow and seven children—these poor fellows invariably leave seven children, in obedience, I suppose, to some occult law—and she immediately gave me a cheque for twenty pounds, and bid me get up a subscription to make a fund for them; so I suppose I must," he added, with an ingenuous sigh; "but I should not, I confess, have done it without her generous example. Warm, is it not?"

"Stay, doctor," replied Gervase, detaining him while he fished a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, "let me add my mite. I am a poor man, though I have not as yet emulated poor Jones in giving seven hostages to fortune, or it should be more. I hope you will let the firm add further to your list."

"Charming young man," reflected the doctor, going off with his booty. "What a pity his politics are so pronounced!"

"Hang the old fellow!" muttered Gervase, going up the steps. "That was a cunning way of begging. These parsons are up to every dodge under the sun to get at one's pockets."

He turned as he entered the house, and nodded to a shabby old countryman, half-farmer, half-labourer, who was slouching by on the other side of the street, and thought what a narrow escape that old man had just had from ending his days in the workhouse, since his savings would have vanished along with Alice Lingard's inheritance, had the crisis he had just successfully passed proved fatal.

CHAPTER VI.

PREDICTIONS.

MRS. ANNESLEY, more majestic than ever in her heavy crape draperies in the cool gloom of her solitary room, received her guest with mournful benignity.

"How good of you to come to a poor lonely old woman!" she said. "You know how it cheers me when you drop in to share my solitary meal."

"A miserable bachelor is only too glad to get"—he was just going to say "a first-rate luncheon," but happily pulled himself up in time to substitute "congenial society, above all ladies' society, with his meals."

"Oh, you have no lack of ladies' society!" she said, with a pleased smile. "When were you last at Arden, and how did you find them all?"

"Perfectly well, thank you, and the roses coming well into bloom. They talked of sending you some in a day or two. I can spare less and less time for home now."

"So busy? You were right about a certain document, Gervase. I have had it drawn up and duly signed and witnessed, and there it is for your perusal." And she took out a paper that he knew to be her will.

"Thank you," he replied, smiling. "I need not see it. If it was drawn up by Pergament, as I advised, it is sure to be in order."

"You don't care, then, to know what a lonely old woman designs for you after her death?" she returned, reproachfully.

"I can't endure to think of such a contingency," he said, earnestly. "Poor as I am, I shall regret the much-needed money that comes to me from that source."

"Gervase," said Mrs. Annesley, with apparent irrelevance, "what is this I hear of Edward Annesley's discredit with his brother officers? Is it true that in consequence of certain scandals he will have to leave the service?"

"It is true that he has been advised to do so, but he has not been officially recommended to resign," replied Gervase.

Mrs. Annesley looked disappointed, and knitted her stern brows in silent thought.

"I cannot imagine," pursued Gervase, "how these rumours get about." And he looked searchingly from under his downcast eyelids at the severe face, which broke into a celestial smile before his furtive gaze.

"No," she returned sweetly, "nor can I. But I believe in a just Heaven, Gervase; and I know that retribution, sooner or later, always overtakes the guilty."

"Ah!" he murmured, with dubious meaning. He was thinking of the letter his quick eye had perceived on the writing-table when he came in. It was a thick letter, addressed to Mrs. Markham. Mrs. Markham, he knew, was not only an old and intimate friend of Mrs. Annesley's, but she was also the mother-in-law of Colonel Disney, Edward Annesley's commanding officer. That accounted for a good deal. Gervase Rickman possessed some imagination; he readily pictured Mrs. Annesley detailing the circumstances of her son's death and her own conjectures respecting it in long and confidential recitals to Mrs. Markham, whose sympathy with her bereaved friend would no doubt be profound, and concluding every confidence with the strictest injunctions to secrecy. He imagined Mrs. Markham burdened with the weight of so delightfully scandalous a secret, recounting it in a moment of expansion, under vows of strictest secrecy, and by no means to the diminution of the scandal, to her daughter, Mrs. Disney. He could see the two ladies gloating over the narrative; the shaken heads, the exclamations, the up-lifted hands, the repeated injunction, "My dear, above all, never breathe a syllable to your husband," sequent upon which injunction he of course saw Mrs. Disney burning for a moment of conjugal confidence, when she would transfer the whole of the recital to the bosom of the Colonel, with the same solemn injunctions to secrecy. Then in his mind's eye he saw this officer looking askance at Edward, and unconsciously treating him with less cordiality than usual. One day, perhaps, Colonel Disney would say to some one, "Wasn't there something rather queer about Paul Annesley's death? Does anybody remember the newspaper reports?" That officer would say to another, "There was something very fishy about Paul Annesley's death. It happened abroad, and was kept out of the English papers, you know—hushed up. It was unlucky for our Annesley that he was on the spot," he might add.

"It was precious lucky for Annesley that his cousin got himself pushed over the precipice," perhaps his audience would say on a subsequent occasion.

"And what had Ned Annesley to do with it?" another hearer might say; "it is to be hoped he didn't push him overboard. It must be awfully tempting to a man's next heir to find himself just behind him at the edge of a *crevasse*. An accidental push, and down the fellow goes, and you get the estate. Shocking accident, papers say; young man of immense property; all goes to a distant cousin."

"It wasn't a *crevasse*, Smith," another man would object, "it was on a cliff by some river in France. Perhaps the Annesleys were larking and one pushed the other over. It was unlucky for our man that the rich one went overboard. He doesn't look like a fellow with something on his conscience."

"He does look like a fellow with a guilty secret."

"And how did they get it hushed up?"

"Easy enough on the Continent. Bribe the officials."

"There was an account of it in the *Times*, if you remember, last autumn. Struck me at the time as a precious queer story. I must say that Annesley has never been the same man since. He wasn't a bad lot before."

"Oh! it is only because he is rich."

"My dear fellow, money never spoils a man's temper or makes him look as if he had baked his grandfather. It's the want of it makes a fellow swear and cut up rough. It's a bad conscience with Annesley, that's why he looks so glum."

"It's the family ghost. They say every Annesley who comes into the property is haunted, and either goes mad or hangs himself."

"You've got hold of the wrong end of the story. It isn't a ghost, it's a curse; every Annesley who gets Gledesworth comes to grief. Reginald Annesley of the Hussars was killed elephant-hunting—or pig-sticking, wasn't it? his father went mad and died. Paul Annesley took this unlucky step over the cliff, and goodness knows what will happen to Ned Annesley; anyway, he's in for a bad thing."

All this Gervase Rickman imagined, and much more, hitting, with the instinct of creative genius, the core of the literal truth. He saw files of last autumn's papers consulted and discussed, and guessed the position his own name would occupy in the general gossip, when disinterred from the brief narrative. He understood, further, much that had hitherto been dark to him respecting the spread of rumour in that part of the world, fitting little bits of information together, and supplying the gap with clever inductions till he had a fair chain of evidence. He remembered an observation of the Vicar's to the effect that Mrs. Annesley was a deeply

wronged woman and knew how to forgive, and this observation was suggestive.

"I conclude," continued Mrs. Annesley, ignorant of what was passing through the mind of the thoughtful and clever young man before her, "that Edward Annesley has sent in his papers."

"Not at all," returned Rickman, with a subtle inflection of triumph in his accent; "he means to live it down, he says."

"It is the first time, Mr. Rickman," she replied, with an angry glitter in her eye, "that an Annesley has preferred his convenience to his honour. There are people who are beneath scorn. Pardon me, I forgot that I was speaking of your *friend.*"

"Of my father's friend, and landlord, and my employer," he returned tranquilly.

"And Alice Lingard's lover," she added, with a glance of disdainful anger.

"Her rejected suitor," he corrected, with a curious smile.

"Rejected? Are you certain?" she asked eagerly.

"Perfectly. We need fear no more from that quarter. He was sent off for good and all, three days ago.".

"Heaven is just," observed Mrs. Annesley with pious fervour.

"Exactly," replied Gervase absently. He was thinking what a clever woman Mrs. Annesley was; it seemed almost a pity she had not come into the world thirty years later, such a woman would indeed be a help-mate for him. He was not sure that she had not been a little too clever for him; he had not intended the Annesley scandal to go so far, and his fertile brain was not yet prepared with a scheme for checking it.

"You probably have not fully considered the risk you run in being associated with that man," she continued.

"And what if I had?" he replied; "a poor man with bread to earn cannot be so over-nice. Besides, as you know, we give up the stewardship on quarter-day."

"And still receive him at your house."

"Pardon me. My father still receives him at his house," he corrected, sighing a little, for he felt that he had a difficult and delicate part to play, in preserving friendly relations with both this stern and resolute woman and the man she hated so bitterly. He thought too with some apprehension of the extreme difficulty of managing with such dexterity as to separate Edward from Alice, and at the same time throw him into Sibyl's society; he was beginning to fear, besides, that Edward's reputation was almost too seriously damaged for Sibyl's marriage with him to be a success. He looked at the rigid lips of the hard woman sitting opposite him, and suspected that his iron will and subtle brain had been matched,

if not over-matched, and mentally endorsed the truth of Raysh Squire's verdict upon Mrs. Annesley, "You can't nohow get upzides with she." But it was important that he should "get upsides with" Mrs. Annesley, and he determined to do so, not knowing the extent to which she was turning him inside out.

Luncheon was announced while his mind was occupied with these reflections, and the conversation was interrupted—not disagreeably to this unfortunate and deeply perplexed child of genius—for he was fagged and hungry, and always knew how to appreciate an excellent meal, daintily set off with rich and tasteful appointments; nor did he fail to appreciate the state Mrs. Annesley affected since her son's death. This event had given her an income quite out of proportion to the house in the street of a country town, which she chose to occupy, nevertheless, since it was her own, and since her position, spite of its woful diminution now that she was no longer the mother of the unmarried Annesley of Gledesworth, was still good enough to enable her to live on in Medington without loss of consideration. Gervase had always felt that he was born for a more brilliant sphere than that he occupied; Mrs. Annesley's complicated cookery, with Frenchified names, was only a suitable tribute to a man so evidently intended by nature for a lofty destiny, and he listened to Mrs. Annesley's long grace with the inward reflection that the meal justified it, and complacently refreshed his inner man to the accompaniment of his hostess's elegant small talk, glad to be excused the more difficult topics the servant's presence had put aside.

He was sorry when they were alone again, and Mrs. Annesley returned to the charge.

"I could never understand," she said, "how you could bring yourself to act with or under that man, after what you saw in the Jura. You have assured me so many times that what you then actually witnessed is insufficient evidence to base a trial upon."

"Dear Mrs. Annesley, need I assure you again? Why revive a topic that must be so especially painful to you?"

"My young friend, do you suppose that topic is ever absent from my mind?" she returned in a deep voice, with a keen cold glance.

"I suppose," reflected the unfortunate young man, "that you are an awful old woman, and that I had better, after all, have had nothing to do with you." But, aloud, he said something about a mother's bereavement being perpetual, at which Mrs. Annesley applied her handkerchief daintily to each side of her nose, and murmured that his sympathy was one of the few solaces left to a forlorn widow.

"You told him," she added, replacing the handkerchief in her pocket with a prompt return to her business-like manner, "that your business had become too large and important to make it worth your while to conduct his affairs?"

"Yes, and it was true; we can do very well without the Gledesworth affairs. I had thought of giving it to Daish, but he has enough to do without. Daish is a very fair man of business; wholesomely dense in a way, but understands when directed; the very man to be under a master."

"My dear Gervase, you take a new partner, and refuse important business, and have branch offices in half-a-dozen towns; that all hangs excellently together, and Edward Annesley might believe you, if he were less of a fool than he is. But what does not fit is the fact that you are constantly bewailing your poverty."

Gervase explained that poverty is a relative term, and depends upon the relation of a man's needs to his possessions. "The fact is," he said in conclusion, "I want money—a great deal of money. No one suspects what my aims really are, but your friendship, dear Mrs. Annesley, has always been so perfect, and you have so much sympathy with whatever soars above the common, that I feel moved to confide in you, the more so as your influence is great, and may materially aid me."

He spoke with a hesitating, almost timid air, like a man who longs to make a confidence but needs some encouragement to bring him to the point. Mrs. Annesley's piercing gaze was directed upon his down-cast intellectual face; she was wondering to what extent he was lying, as indeed she usually did while conferring with him.

"My influence," she echoed, with a melancholy accent, "what influence can a forlorn and childless widow such as I am have? Do not mock my affliction, dear Gervase. *I* am not the mother of Annesley of Gledesworth," and the handkerchief once more appeared, and was again daintily pressed to each side of Mrs. Annesley's finely formed nose.

"Nevertheless," returned Gervase, who knew exactly what she wanted him to say, "you have far more influence than the lady who occupies that position. Influence depends more than is commonly supposed upon force of character. I don't think you quite know the extent to which Mrs. Annesley of Medington is looked up to, and the great sympathy which her sorrows inspire."

She knew that he was fibbing and yet she liked it; flattery is so essential to some natures that they are almost indifferent to its truth or falsehood so long as incense of some kind is offered them. She therefore replied that, though conscious of her own impotence, she was most willing to further her dear friend's views as far as she

could, and begged him, if it would be the slightest solace to him, to confide his aims to her motherly breast. And Gervase, knowing that her genius for intrigue gave her an influence more potent in the furtherance of his purposes than that of rank or wealth, and being unusually expansive on account of the wine he had taken to quiet his troubled mind, replied,

"I am ambitious. I do not intend to remain an attorney in a country town long."

"Your talents are wasted in such a sphere," she replied; "there is no doubt of that. But to what do you mean to rise?"

His ambition had always inspired her with admiration, and the thought that she might bring a brilliant young man into public notice was most pleasing to her, possessing the instinct of patronage to such an unusual degree as she did.

"I intend," he replied, gazing with a pre-occupied air straight before him, "to rule England, if not Europe."

The quiet matter-of-fact air with which he uttered this large resolve startled Mrs. Annesley, and her eyes flashed with unfeigned admiration.

"You aim high," she replied almost breathlessly.

"Why not?" he returned coolly; "with a resolute purpose, a high aim is as easily achieved as a low one."

Mrs. Annesley was too startled to be amused at the idea of a young country lawyer purposing to govern his country, if not the world at large, in this off-hand manner; she saw no bathos in his observations, perhaps in her momentary bewilderment she had a vague notion that Gervase might send her straightway to the Tower if she incurred his displeasure; she could only ask him, with unusual meekness, how he meant to begin.

"First, I must get money," he replied; "then I must get a seat in Parliament. The rest," he added, smiling with a sudden consciousness of the ridiculous side of his pretensions, "will follow."

Yet though he had too wholesome a sense of humour not to be amused at his large assertion, he fully meant it, and Mrs. Annesley, looking silently and thoughtfully upon his resolute countenance, which was now more than usually alight with intellect, and pondering upon the oratorical gifts he was known to possess, upon his strength of will, his industry, his learning, his genius for affairs, and his knowledge of human character, realized all at once that a born statesman was sitting at her table, and that, though, friendless and unknown as he was, he might never rule England, much less Europe, to do which, he would have, as he afterwards informed her, to transform England to a great extent, he would

probably rise to a creditable position in public life. Ruling England might be but a vaunt, yet not wholly an idle one; it was like the marshal's bâton in the knapsack of the republican soldier, or the woolsack in the future of the young barrister, a symbol and aim of the ambition without which men never rise above mediocrity.

She knew him to be unscrupulous, and this in her eyes was a further guarantee of his success. She did not believe with Alice Lingard, that honour and honesty are the only permanent bases of political as of personal greatness, and that, though an ambitious and unscrupulous genius may achieve the highest eminence, such a one is almost certain to fall.

"Come into the garden," she said when she had recovered from her surprise, "and tell me all about it." And they went out and strolled in the shade of the lime-trees for a sunny half-hour, while Gervase unfolded the details of his immediate plans and spoke of the probability of the borough of Medington falling vacant at no distant date, and of the desirability of his finances being in a condition for him to contest it. Then Mrs. Annesley promised him definite financial as well as personal aid, and he knew that neither was to be despised. And although he did not impart his ambitious plans as yet to any one else, he knew that the same occult powers which had affixed a stigma to Edward Annesley, could associate his name with a predicted success which might fulfil itself. He was also aware that Mrs. Annesley had latterly renewed her acquaintance with her aristocratic connections, some of whom were distinguished both in the world of society and in that of politics.

He returned to his office in high spirits; he knew that Mrs. Annesley was far too dangerous as a possible foe, not to be made a certain friend, and in confiding in her and throwing himself upon her, he had secured her on his side for life; he would now be in some sort her own creation, so he had persuaded her.

The very danger of the crisis through which he had just passed increased his confidence in that vague something which he named his destiny. All men are illogical, especially those who make a point of being logical and following nothing but the light of reason, and who think to conquer circumstance by their own unaided will. Gervase, therefore, who regarded religion as the malady of undeveloped minds, and professed to be able to mould his own fate and that of others by the sole power of his purpose, was a firm believer in his lucky destiny, and was constantly tormenting himself with fears lest that capricious divinity

should one day veer round and persecute him, as it had hitherto favoured him.

Having seated himself at his desk that afternoon, and being much occupied with thoughts of his continued good luck, he determined to consult an oracle in which he believed as fervently as any girl believes in the saints she calls upon by the wayside cross. He opened a penknife with a long fine blade, and poised it carefully in his hand with the point directed to the wall opposite him. While doing this, his confidential clerk knocked at the door; but he did not answer, he continued gazing with an intent anxious gaze upon a spot of colour in the pattern of the wall-paper. The clerk then made the preconcerted signal denoting urgency in a series of taps on the door; still no reply, Gervase's hand trembled slightly and his face was pale; he shot the knife dart-like at the spot on the wall, and instantly got up and followed it, and smiled with relief when he found the blade quivering in the very centre of the pattern.

Three times the rite was performed, each time with increasing trepidation; while the clerk, who heard his footsteps, coughed an impatient cough and repeated that signal of urgency. When the blade quivered the third time in the same spot, the tension of the young man's features relaxed, he took the knife and shut it with a tranquil air, saying inwardly that he was now sure of success, and resuming his seat, he bid the clerk enter in his usual manner. It was a favourite axiom of his that all men are fools in some respects.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUIRE OF GLEDESWORTH.

WHEN Edward Annesley reached home at the end of his moonlight ride after the discouraging reception of his suit by Alice, he went to bed and to sleep in the most unromantic fashion, and rose refreshed next morning to eat a hearty breakfast.

After breakfast, he took a cigar and went round the stables, and listened to an account of the symptoms of his sister's riding-horse, and, having attentively examined the creature, prescribed for it; then he carefully felt the legs of a carriage-horse, and decided that there was nothing the matter but swelling from insufficient exercise, and considered other important stable matters, smoking with apparent enjoyment all the time.

Then he passed an hour in his mother's sitting-room, discussing matters of business, looking over the accounts of one of his brothers, who was not yet able to stand on his own foundation, but making no allusion to what had occurred at Arden the day before, beyond saying that he had passed the evening at the Manor.

After this he strolled through the park down to a little cove, surrounded by tall forest trees, growing right down to the water's edge, where there was a tiny pier and bathing-stage and a boat-house, and, stepping into a little boat, sculled out seawards. Then his face became thoughtful, and he began to reflect on what had passed in the garden the evening before.

Alice was friendly towards him, and more than kind, as became her nature; but she did not love him, and he did not think he could ever win her love. Paul's untimely fate had surrounded him with a halo of tenderness; there was a pathos in his sudden death which, Edward decided, would make Alice cling to his memory as to that of a canonized saint.

Yet the fact that Alice besought him to tell the secret of his part in that death, showed that she entertained at least some thought of accepting his proposals, though the fact that she did not trust him indicated conclusively that she did not, and pro-

bably never would love him. A love without trust could not be based upon the reverent perception of moral beauty, which was the foundation of his own love. And it was not so very unreasonable that she should wish him to explain the history of that afternoon; he saw clearly that whether she would finally grow to love him or not, she would most certainly never accept his addresses until the mystery was cleared up. That would be the first step.

As he sculled swiftly over the calm waters, the blue heaven above him and the blue sea beneath, Alice's face rose before him, and the tones of her voice grew upon his ear, and he felt how deeply he loved her and how impossible it was to be happy without her. If he could not win her, he would make no unmanly moan, but the glory of his life would be gone. After the keenness of the disappointment had worn off, he might even find some good, loveable woman to whom he would be a good husband, and who would be a contented wife; but he would never be really happy, he would have missed the best things in life; he even doubted if he could so far conquer his feelings as to marry. As he thought this, seeing Alice's face in imagination and recalling the charm of her presence, tears rose to his eyes, and dimmed the blue vision of sea and sky before him, and it came into his mind that it would be worth doing anything to win her. Should he yield to her wishes and tell her all, taking the risk of what might follow?

So he pondered for a long time, sculling more and more rapidly in the stress of this suggestion, oblivious of the hot sunshine, until the perspiration streamed from his face, while the green shore lessened in the distance, and he was near being run down by a yacht steaming along at high speed.

After all, he had a right to win her; there was no justice in frustrating the happiness of his life because Paul Annesley could have no more earthly enjoyment, and was it not a happier fate for Alice to love a living man than a dead one? He called up a vision of Alice wooed and won, living a tranquil and useful life by his side. He thought how happy he would make her, surrounding her with tenderest love, and protecting her from every trouble; honour and peace would wait upon her steps in the happy home he would give her, and a thousand sweet domestic joys would spring up and blossom in her path. But all this only if she loved him; yet why should she not? The picture was so sweet that he dwelt upon it long, so long that at last it was beginning to confuse his sense of right. He imagined himself telling her the whole story, and tried to think

how she would bear it. He thought he saw horror coming into her eyes as she listened, and anguish clouding her face,—and would that be all? No; if he judged her rightly, something more would come between them—anger and scorn. She would never forgive him, as he could never forgive himself.

Then the current of his thoughts turned; he saw a pitying tenderness stealing into her face, and found himself forgiven for his love's sake, and perhaps, when the anguish had spent itself, loved at last. At this thought the temptation to tell all became urgent. It was so hard to let her go without further efforts to win her. But she did not trust him; *could* she ever love him? What strange infatuation his had been, when first he saw and loved her and thought—preposterous thought—that his love was returned. It must have been pure imagination, because after he knew of Paul's claims she had seemed so different and so distant; doubtless she had never been anything but distant, only his wishes had made him fancy that she inclined to him. Those few bright days at Arden were but days stolen from a fool's paradise, the only paradise, he thought with unwonted bitterness, men ever enjoy in this perverted and perverse earth.

It was pleasant, nevertheless, to remember the brief fool's paradise, which seemed so long and so full of events. He recalled their discussions and arguments upon every conceivable topic, and all the hints of character brought out by trivial events. Once they were talking of "Vanity Fair," and especially of that matchless creature, Becky Sharp, and Alice said that had she been Amelia, she could have forgiven Becky everything but that one crowning injury of revealing George Osborne's infidelity. "It was like killing a soul," she said, "for she destroyed the ideal of a life-time."

The air seemed still to vibrate with the tones of her voice; he remembered the flutter of a ribbon on her dress when she spoke.

No more fool's paradises for Edward Annesley, only the stern facts of life and a stout wrestling with circumstances remained for him, as perhaps was fitting for a tough fellow able to take his full share of hard knocks.

"I will never tell her," he said aloud, though no one heard but the waves and the sea-birds skimming above them, and the light breeze which sprang up and invited him to step his tiny mast and hoist his sail, and flit over the waters in emulation of the gulls. While he sped before the wind, pursuing these reflections, he thought that the best thing in most lives might after all be a happy memory of an untarnished ideal.

The sun had turned, and was already far down the western slope, when the woods and meadows around Gledesworth came in sight again, and he sculled into the cove, put the little boat's head straight for the landing-place, and sprang out the moment the keel ground the shingle. The serene calm which follows on a temptation resisted filled his heart, though he was too little given to introspection to know why he was at peace. As he turned to haul the boat up the shore, an idea struck him, and he saw the exact spot where the coast defences should be strengthened, the weak spot that the enemy would not fail to detect and take advantage of; but it seemed so strange that neither he nor those who planned the fortifications should have seen it before.

Musing of guns, ships, and forts, he strolled along the sunny turf, seeing his chimneys and gables rise above the green domes of woodland encircling them, seeing the downs stretching away beyond the park, until he passed into the golden green shadows of a beech grove and came out in the full blaze of the afternoon sunshine upon the open park-land in front of the house, which stood on a rising ground. It was a fine old Jacobean building in grey stone, built on to an older wing, which extended far back, and was scarcely seen from this approach, and behind which was a beautifully timbered Gothic hall, in good preservation. It was a noble specimen of a stately English home; the park was full of magnificent trees, the growth of ages; all along by the sea, beneath the down-ridge and beyond it for miles, spread well-cultivated fields, interspersed with farms and woods; a goodly inheritance.

Edward Annesley looked at it and wondered if any one could be a whit the better for possessing it, as he did; the bare-armed and brown-faced gardener, pushing his mowing-machine with a pleasant sound over the smooth deep sward, had as good a harvest for his eyes. The tops of the oaks caught the full sunshine in their russet and green leafage against the lucid sky, and moved as pleasantly in the breeze for the gardener as for his master: the blue haze veiled the distance as sweetly and the sunlight lay as warmly for him on the weathered stone of the broad and picturesque house-front.

Edward had been much happier in the old days, when he was but a subaltern officer of artillery with a moderate income and few responsibilities, with no pretensions, but with endless possibilities before him in the profession he loved, if not exactly with a field-marshal's bâton in his pocket, before his meeting with Alice Lingard had created an imperious need in his heart. All he wanted then was a fair chance in the service, the variety and

possible travel and peril of a military life, his books and instruments, and leisure to use them, with the companionship of men of similar tastes. Truly, he reflected, "man wants but little," but by some strange perversity of fate that little is usually the unattainable; Sappho's apple reddening out of reach on the orchard's topmost bough. Even Paul, who so well appreciated wealth and the consideration which accompanies it, had found it worthless without Alice to share his possessions and give the crowning grace to his beautiful home.

Mrs. Edward Annesley was sitting at a table beneath a spreading plane-tree in front of the house, and at some distance from it, with some needlework in her hand. She saw her son issue from the beechen grove and come towards her in the sunshine. Some echo of his musings was in her mind at the moment; she too was beginning to realize the vanity of the good fortune which had so unexpectedly befallen them, though perhaps she would not have done so but for the blighting suspicions which gathered round her son and deprived the whole family in some measure of the social standing their inheritance should have given them. The great house seemed to her, as to Edward, unhomelike, and like him, she thought regretfully of the plain, unpretentious red-brick house mantled with ivy, in which her husband had died, and her latter years had been spent in peace and pleasantness.

The reproach weighed on her, but not as it weighed upon Annesley himself. As her son drew nearer, her heart went out to him. It seemed as if Time had rolled backwards in its course, and not her son but her husband, as she knew him in the fulness of his strength, was coming to her side again.

"Dear child!" she murmured within herself, while her kind eyes clouded, "I never thought him so like his father till of late."

What was the change that every one noticed in him? she wondered, as she watched the well-knit figure, carelessly clad in a light morning suit, moving with firm even tread over the grass. Perhaps his step was too measured, and lacked its former lightness; certainly the dark eyes, shadowed by the straw hat, had lost their youthful joyousness, and looked out upon the world sternly, almost defiantly; and that made him like his father, who had had many a fall in his rounds with Fortune. There was the stamp of ineffaceable trouble on his face; what could it be? Children, she reflected, must always be changing through all the stages of childhood to youth, and then from youth to manhood, and what manhood passes unscathed by trouble and care? Annesley of Gledesworth—she was proud of the title in her fond

way, and thought he became it well; he looked like a man to sit in high places, and be clothed with power and responsibility.

"All alone, mother?" he asked, taking a seat near her, and losing half-a-dozen years from his face as he spoke. "Has any one been or anything happened? I meant to have been in for luncheon, but the wind was fair for a sail."

"And you have been rowing, I see, by your blistered hands. How brown your hands have become! No, nothing has happened, and nobody has driven or ridden out."

"I have just thought of selling Gledesworth," said Edward, abruptly.

"My dear child, selling a property that has been in the family since King John's time!"

"Yes, selling it, curse and all. I don't care for the place, do you?" He looked up and laughed. "It gives me the creeps, and makes me fool enough to believe in the prediction. Upon my word, I wonder nobody ever thought of selling the curse before."

"There might be a difficulty in finding a purchaser, Ned. Oh, my dear," she added, more seriously, "if you could but clear yourself of these suspicions! That is what poisons the place for you—that is our curse."

"I wish I could, for your sake," he replied; "but really you take it too much to heart. What is a little ill-natured gossip after all? Words are but air."

"Oh, that woman!" she exclaimed. "She was the bane of your life long before you were born or thought of. She trifled with your dear father till she nearly wore him out, and no sooner were we engaged than she did all she could to make mischief between us. Not that I believe he ever really cared for her," she added, with asperity, "but most men can be made fools of by artful and unscrupulous women."

"My dear mother," he replied, with some amusement, "that is an old story to rake up. And you must admit that Aunt Eleanor got the worst of it in marrying my Uncle Walter instead of my father."

"There is comfort in that, Ned," she admitted. "If she would but let you alone! It is she who slanders you, and no other. I could tell you stories of the vindictiveness of those Mowbrays that would make your hair stand on end."

"Poor soul!" he said, "think of her trouble. I firmly believe it has turned her brain. She is not responsible for what she does. I said so at the very first, if you remember."

"If she is mad, her temper has made her so, and she ought to

be shut up," replied Mrs. Annesley, with curious logic but firm determination. "My dear," she added, with apparent irrelevance, "I quite believe in you, but it would make me happier if you would tell me the whole story of that miserable business."

"My dear mother," he replied, his face hardening as he spoke until he seemed no longer her son Edward, "you promised me not to reopen that question. We have discussed it too much already."

She looked him in the face, her heart beat, and a dreadful doubt sickened her. She had known this man from his cradle; he had told her all his thoughts and confessed all his errors and follies from the first stammer of infancy till now; could she doubt him? He had never to her knowledge lied since he was old enough to know the meaning of truth, he had even, in his cadet days, told her many of his scrapes. She had tried not to spoil him and turn him into the flabby sinner or saint a widow's eldest son so often proves; she thought that she had never suffered him to rule her, and certainly had not let him play the tyrant to the younger children; she had had very little trouble with him, but she knew that mothers and wives seldom hear the whole history of sons and husbands.

"It is hard not to know. I am your mother!" she exclaimed.

"It is hard not to be trusted, and I am your son," he replied more gently; and then a servant appeared with tea-cups, and they could not pursue the subject. Harriet Annesley's singing came faintly from an open window,

> "Ach Gott, mein Lieb ist todt,
> Ist bei dem lieben Gott,"

and made him think of Alice and Paul.

It broke off abruptly, and Harriet appeared at the top of the steps, down which she floated with a child-like grace, and joined her elder sister, Eleanor, who was now a fine young woman, and the two came to the plane-tree and scolded their brother for going off all day without telling any one.

Then Eleanor poured out tea, and they were all very merry in a homely way. Edward thought how pretty and charming they were, and what a pity it was that the doors of society should be shut upon them just in the golden promise of their lives; and while he was thinking this and affectionately teasing them, he became aware of a sturdy little figure, with a dogged yet blushing face, striding with long heavy steps, straight over the turf towards him.

"Be you Squire Annesley?" asked the boy, stopping just in front of him, the sun blazing full on his hot face, white smock, and dusty boots.

"Yes, boy. What do you want?"

"Then this here's for you," he replied, producing a letter, "and she said there wasn't no answer." With that he turned, and was striding heavily back again without more ado.

"Stop, boy!" cried Edward, who had felt a thrill at first sight of his face, which he recognized vaguely as belonging to Arden; for all the faces there seemed to bear one family stamp. He gave the messenger a bright half-crown, and bid the servant take him in and give him food, but still did not appear in a hurry to read his letter.

"How very romantic!" observed Eleanor; "who is the 'she,' the fair, the chaste, the unexpressive she?"

"Er war mit Herz und Seele meina," sang Harriet, her mine still burdened with her melancholy ditty.

Then he broke the cover and read, his face changing from white to red and back to white again, till he folded the letter very exactly, and put it in his pocket with a thoughtful air. Presently he turned his gaze from the sunshiny trees and turf to his mother and sister, who were occupied with some trifling discussion.

"How would you like to spend the winter in Rome?" he asked. "You might go to Switzerland in August or September, and gradually creep on to Rome by November. We could shut up this house for a year. I might get a long leave and join you. What do you say?"

There was a long and animated discussion, and presently the two girls moved off, full of the new scheme, and left the others alone.

"It is all over," Edward then said to his mother. "She has refused me. Of course I shall think no more of it."

Then he rose and joined his sisters.

The letter was brief and formal. The writer hoped that Mr. Annesley would waste no more time upon an unprofitable subject upon which they could never come to any agreement. What occurred on the afternoon of the 10th of September last year made it impossible for her ever to entertain any thought of marriage. She hoped that in case of their meeting again, she might rely upon his bearing himself towards her as a friend, but nothing more.

This last sentence, which poor Alice would probably never have written but for her painful experience of Paul's tenacious

courtship, was unfortunate in its effect upon Edward. It stung him into a fierce resentment, and made him seize his pen that evening and indite a haughty missive to the effect that Miss Lingard need not be in the least afraid of his troubling her with unwelcome attentions, a letter that wounded her to the heart's core.

The long golden beams of the evening sun stole through the closed blinds and fell on his paper as he wrote; such long beams were then falling upon Gervase and Alice on the down above Arden, when the former was uttering the simple words which echoed so long through the memories of both, "Quite right."

PART V.

CHAPTER I.

AN ENGLISH TRIUMPH.

ALL the eight bells in the church steeple were pealing down in joyous tumult through the sun-gilt smoke canopy which was spread above the slate roofs of Medington one mild November afternoon; the streets of that quiet little town were filled with an unwonted life and stir, thickest and most turbulent in the vicinity of the town-hall, the open space in front of which was black with human beings. It is curious that crowds, no matter of what they may be composed, always are black; it is curious, too, that human faces in the mass are always of one tint, a very pale bronze without the faintest shade of pink; probably no one ever saw a crowd blush or turn pale, yet these truly awful phenomena must sometimes occur.

The windows surrounding the space before the town-hall were black with humanity, so was the balcony which served as hustings. When the eye became accustomed to the mass and began singling out its component parts, it detected many points of colour; a large proportion of the men in the street wore the fustian, garb of the artisan; the few female forms discernible at the windows or in carriages contributed less lugubrious tints, and on many a coat, whether of cloth or fustian, there fluttered gay bunches of ribbon, dark blue and crimson on some, light blue and yellow on others. Those who wore the pale colours were radiantly and triumphantly aggressive, those who wore the dark, sullenly and defiantly so. All were demeaning themselves like Bedlamites; a few sad and anxious policemen jostled about among them were trying not to observe anything, one of these in his efforts to preserve an indifferent and easy demeanour, seemed quite absorbed in a close and searching examination of the pale blue sky above, across which some pigeons were flying, their clanging wings unheard in the tumult; the fact that a band of musicians bearing the dark

colours were flying precipitately down a side street, pursued by various missiles, kicks and thumps, with their hats now and then crushed over their noses, and their instruments vibrating to unmusicianly strokes, did not pierce through his apparent abstraction.

It was a scene to kindle wonder in the breast of an observant Chinaman or Bedouin Arab, if such had chanced to be strolling through Medington High Street just then. A gentleman on the balcony was gesticulating and shouting unheard in the tumult made by the bells, and the cheering, yelling, groaning and whistling of the crowd. Yet people appeared to be listening to this frantic person through the uproar, and punctuated his discourse by hootings, hissings, cries of hear-hear and clapping of hands; also by more personal favours, such as bags of flour, which for the most part fell short of him and burst with uncalculated effect upon unsuspecting citizens below to the loud merriment of citizens not so favoured. He was succeeded by another orator, and yet another. Now and again somebody, usually some half-grown boy, would utter a hoarse, half-despairing, half-defiant snout of "Stuart for ever!" whereupon the citizens with light ribbons would fall upon him pell-mell, and hustle and thump him with most Christian vigour, themselves hustled and thumped in turn by a posse of dark colours, who would rush to the rescue of their side. Had the intelligent foreigners asked the reason of these sudden displays of fraternal feeling, the belligerents would probably have been puzzled how to answer them.

So great and overpowering was the joy in the breasts of the light colours, that one of them would occasionally crush the hat over the nose of a brother light colour, out of pure gladness of heart and excess of brotherly love. Shopkeepers had hastily put up their shutters at the first crash of the bells, and prudent people, and those who preferred quiet enjoyments to the turbulent delights of laying about them with their fists, had cautiously transferred the dark colours, if so unfortunate as to wear them, from their coats to their pockets, a device which little profited one unlucky citizen, who effected the transfer more quickly than dexterously, and was betrayed by the ends of the streamers peeping from his coat-tail pockets; he was finally seen fleeing coatless down a back street, after having furnished infinite sport to the Philistine crowd.

The balcony was now cleared, the crowd centred itself closely about a carriage waiting at the principal door of the town hall, and removed the astonished horses decked with light blue favours from the traces; this was the moment for another carriage, bear-

ing dark favours and standing at a door in a side street, to take up a gentleman whose smile was rather forced, and bear him swiftly away. A great deep cheer, such a sound as comes only from broad-chested Englishmen, now rose with gathering intensity like the rising thunder of a league-long breaker and almost silenced the clashing bells, which were firing their sonorous salutes; the windows became white with the flutter of ladies' handkerchiefs; the crowd exhibited severer signs of dementia, and then a slight figure issued hat in hand from the hall and took his seat in the carriage, followed by three taller and broader men, all wearing the triumphant light favours. Then the carriage moved slowly on, pulled and pushed by strong-armed, loud-voiced citizens, few of whom had any direct influence on the election; bouquets fell into it from ladies' hands; a citizen, unduly influenced by beer, staggered forwards and shook a devious fist in the faces of the gentlemen in the carriage, thickly shouting, "Stuart for ever!" and then fell into the arms of a policeman, where he wept and told the policeman he loved him like a brother, and, amid shouts of "Rickman for ever!" declarations of the triumphant majority and exultant cheers, the carriage, followed by the light-favoured band, wedged its way through the square and moved up the principal street.

The Chinaman and the Arab would have been gratified by the sight of one sane and calm person in the midst of this strange madness, namely the central figure of all the tumult, who sat serenely observing everything, with the declining sun firing his fair hair, and a very slight expression of disdain upon his thoughtful and resolute face, which was pale with the fatigue of the last few weeks, but the habitual look of power and purpose on which was undisturbed by any sign of excitement or triumph.

"It is the first step," he thought to himself; yet he was constrained to confess, that although it was a fine thing for a young provincial attorney of no particular family or local influence to be returned a Liberal member for that fine old Conservative borough, the first Liberal member within the memory of man, it was a very long way from ruling England and perhaps the world, which latter would need some slight alterations before being ruled by England. But "the rest will follow," Gervase thought, knowing that almost anything is possible to a born ruler with a fixed purpose and resolute will. Mrs. Walter Annesley, leaning from her open window to throw him a bouquet bound with his colours, and receive his deferential salute, felt a thrill of pride when she looked upon the pale intellectual face, so self-contained and calm amid the mad tumult; and when she contrasted the expression of his counte-

nance with that of his supporters in the carriage, two of whom were well-known public men, and all of whom were flushed with excitement at this unexpected accession to their party, she echoed Gervase's thought, "the rest will follow." She knew too that these men, with whom Gervase had been actively working for some time before he stood for the borough, expected a great deal to follow from talents such as his. Gervase was in some sort her own creation; she had given him substantial aid; and it was she who had introduced him to the Liberal ex-Cabinet Minister who would not fail to see that powers so exceptional as his should be put to good use. Through Gervase, life had acquired a fresh interest for Mrs. Annesley; his career would feed the pride which had been so cruelly crushed by her son's untimely death.

At this moment Gervase smiled, for his observant eye caught a glimpse of Dr. Davis, that worthy alderman and ex-mayor, that staid and important medical gentleman and acknowledged leading practitioner, being hustled and bonneted, and laying about him manfully in defence of his dark favours, which the triumphant Radicals were trying to snatch. A little farther on, that discreet and learned limb of the law, Mr. Pergament, was ignominiously bolting down a side street and vanishing into the darkness of a friendly passage, the door of which opened for him, and Mr. Daish, Rickman's own partner, arm-in-arm with Mr. Dates, the grocer, was marching along in triumph, colours flying, and uttering spasmodic cries of "Rickman for ever! Hurrah!"

Gervase wondered if any other influence save that of strong drink would have power thus to move these grave sons of civilization from their wonted decorum, and mused deeply on the eccentricities of the national temperament, so ponderously and immovably solemn, and yet on occasion so absurdly boyish and capable of rollicking fun. Here was a quiet little town, full of sad-faced shopkeepers and stolid working-men, going stark mad because somebody was about to represent some of them—a very small proportion—in Parliament. It amused him excessively to think that he was supposed to represent the cumulative political mind of such a set of simpletons. He thought what humbug representative government was, even if pushed to the logical fulness of universal suffrage. The great thing in moving the masses, he reflected, is to have a cry, a catchword, the more dubious in meaning the better. He had seen two little girls slap each other's faces because one was for Rickman and the other for Stuart. The crowd surging about him and dragging his carriage knew and cared little more than those little maids for the meaning of the cry, most of them had no votes, the most enthusiastic were the

street boys. Some voices, it is true, shouted "the ballot" and "extension of suffrage," but even these were catchwords for the most part, caught up from constant iteration in recent speeches and newspapers. So it was and so it will be. The cries of Guelf and Ghibelline rent the Italian communities of the Middle Ages asunder, and one of the factions formed by these cries was itself cut into Blacks and Whites in Florence in the days of Dante, whose life was soured for a word's sake. There were catchwords in the olden days of

> "The glory that was Greece,
> And the grandeur that was Rome."

There are catchwords in the youngest colonies of to-day, and he, thought the new member for Medington, who knows how to fashion and wield catchwords knows how to rule mankind.

After all, what are catchwords but imperfect and attenuated symbols, and what are symbols but bodies to the souls of thoughts? Perhaps even worn-out soul-vacated symbols are better than absolute vacancy.

Mr. Rickman, half-incredulous of his senses, sat with Sibyl at a window looking towards the town-hall and heard the final state of the poll declared; Sibyl heard it with less surprise but with a gladness which made her eyes brighter than ever; she smiled inwardly at the sight of her brother's triumph, the comic side of which did not fail to appeal to her.

Alice had refused to be present, and Gervase had thought this a good sign. Mrs. Rickman had declined going, on the ground that her son's possible defeat would be too serious a thing to learn in public, in which Alice agreed with her; they stayed at home to console each other.

In those days, before the ballot and compulsory education and all such fine recipes for the regeneration of mankind, news did not fly quite so fast as now; people were not on such familiar terms with their freshly tamed demon, electricity, and country roads were not cobwebbed with telegraph wires. I think nobody had as yet thought of extending and multiplying the plague of human babble and other noises by means of wires and drums.

Thus people in Arden were ignorant of the result of the great political battle raging within a few miles of them; there was no cannon-thunder to come booming on the wind to the listening ears of the villagers; the nearest approach to the noise of fight was the faint confused swirl of the Medington bells, when the eddying wind rushed up the valley and over the downs with a larger sway, and that far-off sound merely told them that the battle was lost

and won, as most battles are; it did not say who was the victor in the bloodless fray. Nevertheless, Raysh Squire, with a large dark blue and crimson favour, pinned with ostentatious profusion upon his jacket, descended early in the afternoon into the village for news and naturally took his way to the Golden Horse, which, besides, was the first house in the street, as the proper magazine for that commodity. But the Golden Horse offered absolutely no attractions that afternoon, beyond the gross and obvious charms of potent liquor; even the landlord was absent, and the landlady was not in the mood for social intercourse.

Just opposite the Golden Horse, on the same side of the high-road and forming the other corner house to the by-road which led past the parsonage and on to the churchyard, stood a solid stone cottage, so old that it had sunk a couple of feet beneath the level of the high-road, which, perhaps, when new it dominated; like the leaders of thought, who in their golden prime stand above mankind, but, as Time rushes on, depositing a thick sediment of fresh ideas, sink gradually into the groove of old-fashioned thinkers.

This sunken condition, though inconvenient in heavy rains, added, in Raysh's opinion, to the charm of the cheery little home, because it enabled one, without stirring from the cosy ingle-nook, to see over the flowers in the window the lower parts of everything that passed, thus enabling a person of imagination to divine the whole, and preventing small things from being overlooked, and here he was wont to spend many a leisure quarter of an hour at the hearth of his daughter, who was married to Joshua Baker, the vicar's gardener, and had more than once conferred the dignity of grandfather upon him.

It looked specially inviting in the mild November day; the pear-tree spread over the blank gabled wall facing the inn, though leafless, was yet suggestive of mellow fruitage, and the few flowers in the tiny channel between the bricked-up road and the windows, though past bloom were still cheerful; the geraniums inside the diamonded lattices were glowing with scarlet blossoms, the pale sun-beams brought out warm tints in the stone and thatch, and rosy-faced Ruth stood in the doorway, with a baby in her arms and an infant playing on the dry road in front of her, to take the air and see the world.

"Who's in?" she asked, moving aside, while Raysh descended the two steps and bowed his head to enter the low doorway, which admitted at once to the dwelling-room, a cosy little nest, pervaded by the vague odour peculiar to country cottages and mellowed rather than darkened by the smoke of years.

"That's just what I was agwine to ask," returned Raysh, dropping into the wooden arm-chair fronting the window and tapping the bowl of his pipe on the hearth, on which burnt a fire of wood and furze, making warm reflections in the walnut dresser with its shining plates and cups, and on the tall oak-cased eight-day clock which ticked with a familiar home-like sound against the smoke-browned wall. "Aint Josh home?"

"No; Josh likes to see what's going on. You may be bound he won't start home till he knows who's got in."

Then Raysh informed his daughter that a person from Medington passing through Arden at midday had declared the state of the poll to show a majority for Rickman. "'Twas a Liberal lie," he commented, not intending any double meaning. "They thinks if only they lies hard enough, 'twill hearten up 'tothers to vote on the winning side."

"I wish Josh wouldn't bide in Medington," returned Ruth, whose politics were of a purely personal cast. "I can't abide these lections; they're nothing but drink and broken heads, so fur as I can make out, and family men are better out of them."

"It takes a powerful mind to see into politics," observed Raysh; "politics is beyond women. For why? A ooman's mind is made to hold in-door things; 'taint big enough for out-door."

Ruth reflected on this remark in silence, while she laid her baby in the cradle and called the elder child in by the fire, where it babbled happily to itself.

"What has politics to do with Mr. Gervase getting in?" she asked at length. "Many's the time I've asked Josh what politics is, and all he can say is 'it's what the women can't understand.' There must be a power of politics in the world, for there's a many things I can't understand."

"Understanding," continued Raysh, "aint expected of women. They talks over much aready without understanding, and the Lard only knows where their tongues would be if they'd a got summat to talk about! There's mercy in the way a ooman's made after all, Ruth. Politics now is a mazing subject; it makes the men talk pretty nigh so fast as the women. I've a yeared em say these yer members 'll talk two hours at a stretch in Parlyment; some on em 'll goo on vur dree or vour hours when they be wound up. They does nothing but talk, so vur as I can zee—a talky traäde is politics, a talky traäde."

"I haven't anything agen the talk," replied Ruth, "it's the drink and the broken heads I can't abide. There! it's gone four

and the bit of dinner done to death aready. One side is as bad as the other, so fur as I can see."

"You caint see fur, Ruth; you aint made to, and you med war'nt whenever a ooman tries to look furder than Providence meant her to, there's mischief. Taint every man can zee into politics, let alone a female ooman. Politics has two zides. One zide's vur keeping what we've a-got, 'tother's for drowing of it all away. A mis'able mazing subjick is politics—mis'able mazing, to be sure."

"I'm sure I wish they'd keep their politics up in Parlyment and not bring em down this country-side, throwing temptation in the way of steady family men with their living to get," said Ruth, going to the door and once more looking vainly down the road for the truant husband, whose dinner was spoilt now beyond remedy.

"Ay, that's the way with the women," continued her father reflectively; "there aint hroom inside of em vur out-door speculations. Their minds is made vur to hold vittles and clothes, and childern and claning and sickness. I 'lows there aint hroom enough inside o they vur mazing subjecks like politics. But there aint no call vor ee to hrun out agen what you caint understand, Ruth. Providence have a-made politics vur men-volks, zo as they med hae zummat to talk about and hrade in the newspapers when they've a done work. Providence have a-made politics vur gentlevolks zo as they med hae zummat to do when they baint a hunting or a shooting. Whatever would gentlevolks do if they'd hadn't a got no politics? I 'lows they'd pretty nigh fret the skin off their boäns, they'd be that dull and drug. You haint no call to hrun out agen Providence, Ruth." Raysh sighed with a pious air, and shook his head over his daughter's errors, the latter hearing him with the tolerant reflection that men-folk would have their say, and it mattered little what they said.

The western sky was all a-fire with crimson, melting into a violet zenith; delicate opal-tinted cloudlets were breaking apart over the pale blue on the south horizon, and still Joshua had not returned. The little room was aglow now with firelight, and sent warm gleams across the road through the diamond lattice and the open door; further on the Golden Horse's bar-window cast ruddy beams upon the sycamore boles outside; a distant glow down the village revealed the forge, where the clink, clink, of the blacksmith's hammer made cheery melody to the burring accompaniment of bellows and flame; a faint blue mist lay over the fields, and an eddy of wind sent the dry aromatic leaves hurrying across the road as if driven by a sudden panic, like those souls which Dante saw driven

confusedly to the dark waves of Acheron, where the grim ferryman's oar chastised the loiterers; then the eddy turned, and the panic-stricken rush of the leaves changed to a light aërial dance, joyous and graceful, till the dancers dropped in the dust as if with sudden weariness. The hands of the tall clock in the cottage pointed to near five when Mrs. Rickman was returning with Alice Lingard and Hubert, the latter very magnificent in the Liberal colours, from a walk; lingering every now and then to talk to a cottager, though her mind was far too pre-occupied with the one subject of Gervase's election for her discourse to be very connected.

"Joshua not home yet?" she asked, pausing at Ruth's door. "Well, Raysh, what a mild evening! No; we have heard nothing yet. Miss Lingard took me out of the way on purpose. We don't in the least expect my son to be returned, but I shall be sorry all the same, and bad news, you know, will keep."

This Mrs. Rickman had repeated in various different ways fifty times that afternoon to Alice, who took a more sanguine view of the question, though she, too, was nervous. Mrs. Rickman's final remark had been, "Whatever we do, Alice, we must not condole with him. We must look upon the defeat as a matter of course."

But they had not been seated many minutes by Ruth's hearth, when a heavy step was heard upon the road, and Joshua himself, unconscious of visitors, stamped noisily down the steps and on to the sanded floor crying, "Hooray! Rickman's in!"

CHAPTER II.

BY THE HEARTH.

JOSHUA BAKER received as guerdon for his news an unexpected five shillings from Mrs. Rickman and an expected scolding from Ruth, for he had not only wasted hours in Medington, but had evidently been in a skirmish, of which he bore the proof in rent garments.

"Whatever call had ye for to go fighting when you knowed Mr. Rickman was in?" his wife asked.

"Two or dree was laying about them," he explained, "and I thought I med so well jine in," an explanation that did not satisfy Ruth, whose feminine mind had not room in it to admit the obvious fact that no sensible man can keep still when there is good fighting to be had for nothing. But these confidences took place after the visitors had left the cottage, which they very quickly did, walking over the dry dead leaves lying thickly in their path, with hearts ready to dance with the lightness of the dancing leaves.

"I suppose it is true, Alice," said Mrs. Rickman, pausing with a shock of misgiving beneath the sycamores and looking dubiously towards Medington at the crimson western sky, which glowed through the dark elms, the delicate leafless branches and tall trunks of which were traced blackly against the warm colours. Alice laughingly re-assured her, and they hastened up the lane to the Manor, just as one or two liquid stars appeared above its chimneys in the pale green sky.

"It is surprising," Mrs. Rickman continued, "that your uncle and I should have two such clever children. To be sure we had only two."

"Quality is better than quantity," replied Alice, wondering if Mrs. Rickman thought that Gervase and Sibyl inherited the concentrated power of a baker's dozen of children.

"I believe that Sibyl is writing a book, Alice," Mrs. Rickman said with a mysterious air, as they reached the flight of steps leading into the porch, through the half-open door of which a warm light streamed. "Her father says that she is capable of anything

after that last article of hers on compulsory education; though I daresay Gervase gave her all the ideas, if he did not write half of it. And now I should like to see him married to a really nice girl to whom I could be a mother."

"So should I," returned Alice tranquilly; "but I should be jealous of the nice girl, Aunt Jenny; that is, if you were too fond of her."

No sooner had they entered the hall than all the servants came crowding into it, with John Nobbs, the bailiff, and his wife, all eager to proclaim the good tidings; and scarcely had the congratulations and comments subsided, when a carriage drove up to the door, and Mr. Rickman and Sibyl, the latter radiant with excitement, sprang out, and the congratulations began over again; wine was brought, and the new member's health was enthusiastically drunk.

Alice stood a little apart, with Hubert lying at her feet, as if studying the scene with interest, and looked on at the animated group with deeply stirred feelings, in which warm affection for her adopted parents and Sibyl predominated. Her lip trembled, and tears, which she could not explain, dimmed the figures standing in the blaze of the hearth-fire, dimmed the oak-panelled walls, full of mysterious shadows, the swinging lamp overhead, the glitter of glasses, and the decanter from which Sibyl was pouring the sparkling wine with a face infinitely more sparkling; and the thought came to her that in the happiness of these people, who were so dear to her, she too might find a little gladness. Yet she reproached herself because she was not glad enough and did not overflow with high spirits like Sibyl, forgetting the difference in their temperaments, and calling herself selfish. But how long would this happiness last? she wondered, thinking of Gervase's insatiable ambition, and the stormy and uncertain career on which he was launched.

She was nearer the door than the others, and the pricking of Hubert's ears called her attention to the rumble of approaching wheels, unheard by the bacchanalian group before the hearth, and so it happened that she went to the door and opened it just as Gervase's carriage drew up, and the first thing he saw was her figure in the arched doorway traced upon the glowing light from within, with the watchful Hubert by her side, decked with his colours.

It was the sweetest moment in the day to him; in a moment he had cleared the steps, and was standing with both hands clasped in Alice's, receiving her cordial greeting, "Dear Gervase, I *am* glad! I think we have all lost our senses with pleasure."

She was not surprised that his hands trembled as she held them, or that they retained their pressure long after she had relaxed hers, or that he did not speak for some moments in answer to the congratulations showered upon him. He was tired and excited, overwrought with the tension of the last few weeks; no wonder he was not quite himself.

Leaving him to the tender mercies of his family, she went herself to the deserted kitchen and fetched the coffee which had been made ready for him, and administered it before any one else had time to think of it, with the observation that even heroes are mortal.

"One might think," observed the hero, after gratefully taking the coffee, "that nobody ever got into Parliament before. As the Scotch nurse said to the dying woman, 'Hech, hizzie, dinna mak such a stour, ye're nae the first to dee.' Why even Hubert condescends to notice me."

"Since mounting your colours he considers himself a politician," Alice replied; but she was not sure that Hubert's glance was of an entirely friendly nature, for though he went up to receive the offered pat on the head with his usual stateliness, the white of his eyes was distinctly visible.

A reaction is inevitable after excitement. The family party, after dinner a couple of hours later, was unusually quiet. They were all in the white drawing-room, one window of which was uncurtained and showed the quiet night sky, moonless but throbbing with the pale brilliance of stars, and occasionally irradiated by the flashing trail of a meteor. Alice, seated at the piano, could see through this window, the very window in which she was sitting when Edward Annesley, himself a meteor flashing through the peaceful starlight of her youth, first saw her. She was playing soft and dreamy music of her own imagining, as she so frequently did when seeking to express her feelings; she seemed to be drawing the inspiration for her music from the tranquil star-worlds towards which her face was turned. Sibyl was reclining in a chair, doing nothing but listen to Alice and stroke the cat upon her knee, to the anger of Hubert, who was observing puss with one eye, as he lay at his mistress's feet with his muzzle on his forepaws. Mr. Rickman slept audibly in his chair on one side of the hearth with a newspaper folded on his knee; Mrs. Rickman slumbered peacefully in her chair on the other side of the hearth; the future ruler of England, if not the world, appeared to be following his parents' example in the corner of a sofa, but, though his eyes seemed to be closed, they were in reality as watchful as Hubert's, and were aware of every slight movement of Alice, as she swayed over her instrument making music and looking with

an earnest gaze at the starry sky. Every curve in the graceful form traced against the comparative darkness of window and sky, every change in her thoughtful face, and every note that answered the touch of her slender skilful fingers, stirred the depths of his heart with an intensity that was akin to pain. She was not happy, that was too evident: and yet it was long since that evening on the down when he uttered those two fateful words, "Quite right;" summer had faded and bloomed and faded again till the fourth winter from that summer was upon them. Yet in all that time he had seen no change in the sadness which then settled upon her, nor found anything to warrant any indulgence of his hopes, and during that lapse of time Alice had scarcely seen Edward Annesley.

When the Annesleys chanced to be at Gledesworth it happened that Alice was not at Arden; she was more often away from home than in former days. Had it gone so hard with her? Gervase wondered, did she really care so much for that "good-looking fool?" or was this sadness only the vague unrest of a woman the promise of whose youth is unfulfilled? Sibyl had not that look of deep inward sorrow.

While he was thus observing her with a yearning gaze, she turned her head from the window and looked towards the hearth, meeting his eye, and smiled a smile of perfect confidence and affection, which transfigured her face and stirred him with a vague trouble.

He left his place and drew a chair to the piano, on which she continued to play. "I thought I had caught you napping for once, Gervase," she said.

"You will never do that," Sibyl said, looking up from the cat she was petting and teasing, "he is the proverbial weasel. I mean to hide in his room some night to see if he ever really sleeps."

"The world," he replied, "belongs to the man who can wake longest. 'Before her gate (*i.e.* Honour's) high God did sweat ordain And wakeful watches ever to abide.' Am I quoting rightly, Sibyl?"

There arose a dispute about the quotation, the music died away, and Sibyl was so provokingly confident that the lines occurred in a sonnet, while Alice was as firmly convinced that they belonged to the Faerie Queene, that Alice left the room for the purpose of fetching Spenser from his bookshelf in proof.

"People ought never to be in earnest after dinner, especially when everybody is tired," said Sibyl, petulantly, upsetting the cat, and taking Alice's place at the piano; "earnestness is Alice's besetting sin, and I believe it is ruining her digestion."

Sibyl played in her spasmodic fashion snatches from different

composers, for she had not Alice's graceful gift of transmuting her own fancies into music as they arose; her parents slept on, and Gervase gradually, after a fashion of his own, got himself from a photograph book, to a picture on the wall, and thence to a piece of bric-à-brac, until he reached the doorway, through which he silently disappeared. Thus when Alice, having verified the quotation, issued from the bookroom to the hall with her heavy volume, she found Gervase standing before the hearth, gazing thoughtfully into the fire, which was getting low.

When she appeared, he kicked a log into place, thus stirring the decaying embers, and making some fresh wood kindle.

"Come," he said, pointing to a carved oak settle; "it is nice here, quite *gemüthlich*, and we can talk at our ease."

Alice wondered that a man who had had such a surfeit of talk during the last few weeks did not take the opportunity of enjoying a little silence, but took her place on the settle, laying the great book on the table, and told him about the Spenserian quotation, while he knelt on one knee before the hearth and plied the bellows, with the air of a man whose fate depended upon rousing a crackling flame from the logs.

At last he made a noble fire, the brightness of which leapt up into the dark beams of the ceiling, danced airily over the black panels, playing at hide and seek with the lurking shadows in them, and quite overpowering the light of the swinging lamp. Then he rose, and stood leaning against the carved chimney jamb, looking down into Alice's face, which was irradiated by the brilliant blaze, saying nothing.

She spoke of the times when their favourite winter sport was making the hall fire burn, and of their rivalries and quarrels over the bellows.

"Sometimes," she said, "I think the pleasantest thing in life is to remember what one did as a child. But none of us could make such a fire as you could. It is a pity," she concluded, "a really first-rate career as a stoker has been marred for the sake of——"

"An indifferent one in politics," he added. "But no, Alice, it will not be indifferent, it will and must be brilliant, and I shall owe it to you if it is."

"To me? Are you dreaming, Gervase?"

"No; I am speaking sober truth. No one has nursed my ambition and cherished and developed my energies as you have, Alice. You always believed in me; you have been my inspiration; but for you I should have dared little and done less. You would never dream what you are to me, dearest."

His voice quivered a little and lost its usual energetic ring; it

touched her heart and made her hesitate to reply. "It is kind of you to say that," she faltered at last, "I have always hoped to be a good sister to you, next to Sibyl. You have been more than brother to me."

"I *am* more than brother," he replied, in his fuller tones; then he paused a moment. "Alice," he continued, "this has been a fortunate day for me, marking my first step in public life; I have, as you know, a little superstition about lucky days, and I hope this may prove fortunate in another sense. Public life, power, success, all these do not fill a man's life. There are deeper things that touch him nearer home, that are the foundation upon which he builds the superstructure of active life. A happy domestic centre is a necessity to one who is to do good work in the world. Nothing is any good to a man whose heart is hollowed out by unsatisfied yearnings and vain hopes."

Her face grew graver as she listened to the deepening vibrations in the mellow voice, which was not invariably mellow, but sometimes harsh; and her heart ached. She knew what was coming; the old trouble which she thought for ever at rest, was starting afresh into life. He was very dear to her, dearer than she thought, and the prospect of having to wound him in an hour so happy, and casting such a cloud over his first triumph, was inexpressibly painful. She could not meet his gaze; she averted her head and watched the firelight playing over a panel and making the suit of armour in front of it stand out grim and full of hostile suggestion. Hubert sat up with his head just above her knee, and a look of sympathy in his eyes. "The dog at least is faithful and true," shot across her mind with no apparent relevance; for whom did she suspect of falsehood?

"Oh, Gervase!" she exclaimed, "I did so trust in your brotherhood! I thought you had kept your promise."

"I did keep it till now—and at such a cost! Can you think what it must be to live in perpetual warfare with oneself? To crush the best and dearest feelings? Oh, Alice! have I not tried all these years? Have I not stood by in silence and seen others preferred? Did I not see your trouble, and yet was silent? Did I ever by word or look betray what I could not conquer? I have often said that will can conquer everything, and it is true. But something has conquered me, it is stronger than even my strong will. And unless you can give me some hope, Alice, nothing will ever be any good to me."

"If I had but foreseen this," she replied, "I would have gone away; I would never have stayed near you to encourage false hopes."

"Not false; they *must* realize themselves, being so strong and invincible," he returned in a tone that made her tremble; for it recalled his passionate assertion on the downs so long ago that he would win her in spite of herself. And all things seemed to conspire that he should win her. A remorseless fate seemed to be slowly hedging her in and driving her to bay; her life was barren and desolate, her will in comparison with that of Gervase was as silk to iron. He had a secret mastery over her which sometimes repelled her when she felt most tenderly towards him, for she was not one of those singularly constituted women who like, or profess to like, to have a master; her pride and self-respect revolted at the notion of subjection. Whenever she was conscious of this mastery, her heart turned from him, and she feared him and dreaded her own weakness.

Instantly he was aware of the change his words produced in her, and knew he had made a false step, on which he hastened to return; he saw the proud blood flash to her cheek as she hardened her gaze to meet his.

"It is so hard to have no hope," he added, in a tone that at once disarmed her. "Life is new to you, Alice, fresh interests might still arise for you—in the course of time. I can wait."

She said nothing; but her tears fell. Then he told her how he had tried, and tried in vain to conquer his feelings through all these years, and spoke of the exquisite pain of being so near to her and yet so far off, of the difficulty of the part he had had to play, of seeing her suffer and being impotent to help her. He spoke of their years of affectionate intercourse, of his parents' wishes and of the sorrow they would feel if they had to part with her. He hinted that it was impossible during the hey-day of youth to live always in the past, that it was well sometimes to turn down a leaf for ever in the book of life, and begin afresh with new aims and hopes. Life was full of duty and responsibility, and to make a fellow-creature happy was no mean aim.

She believed every word he said, and her heart bled for him. He believed most of it himself; for when people are in the habit of manipulating statements of facts to suit their own purposes, the distinction between the actual and the desirable is apt to grow very shadowy, and to deliver a round unvarnished tale becomes a Herculean labour of the first magnitude.

But she could only tell him, as gently as possible, that his hopes were vain; and then they were interrupted.

Gervase was not sorry for the interruption. He thought enough had been said for the time, and was as satisfied as it is possible for a man who is very much in love to be on receiving a

direct refusal. This refusal was very different from the first; all the circumstances in Alice's life were now different and more in his favour. When they went upstairs, he sat very comfortably before the blaze of the drawing-room fire, feeling that things were advancing, however slowly. Chance had again set Alice against the background of the star-lit sky. He looked at her pale and troubled face, and saw a falling star shoot across the heavens behind her at the very moment when his heart was uttering the passionate wish of his life. The star made him almost certain of success; he asked Sibyl if she had seen it and remembered to wish, and set Mr. Rickman off upon one of his interminable monologues on shooting-stars and the various superstitions and fancies connected with them, thus giving himself leisure to be silent and think in peace, and Alice space to recover from her perturbation unobserved.

Alice sat long by her fire that night, instead of going to bed; she was too much stirred to sleep, and was a prey to a ceaseless whirl of thoughts over which predominated the foreboding that she would ultimately marry Gervase in spite of herself. She thought of the years she had spent under that roof, of the deep ineradicable feelings which were twined about the familiar trees, gables and garden plots of Arden. The very figures in the carved oak were old and dear friends; no place could ever wear the same homelike face for her. She had always admired Gervase's talents, done homage to the energy of his character, and felt the charm of his society. But in the last year or two he had gradually come to fill a larger space in her life. A vague unspoken something had arisen between herself and Sibyl since the day when each read the other's secret, the complete confidence of their early friendship was broken by the reticence that discovery created on each side; though their affection was not diminished. At the same time the bitter sorrow through which Alice had passed created a stronger need for the healing of affectionate intimacy, and she unconsciously threw herself more and more on Gervase's friendship.

When a man tells a woman of his struggles and difficulties, it is not only a sign that he has a very deep regard for her, but it is the surest way of winning her heart. This Gervase knew. He believed that Othello would have sighed in vain, but for the happy instinct which made him relate the perilous adventures which so stirred Desdemona's fancy and touched her heart; in which case she might have escaped suffocation and lived to a green old age; while but for similar narratives on the part of Æneas, Dido of Carthage would never have mounted the famous

pyre. Therefore he fell into the habit of confiding his ambitions, aims and struggles to Alice—with a certain reserve, of course; for it is not to be supposed that Desdemona was in a position to compile a complete biography of Othello, while Dido was very far from knowing the whole history of Æneas; it is even possible that both these warriors, like Göthe, may have mingled a little *Dichtung* with the *Wahrheit* out of their lives, it is certain that Gervase was far too clever not to do so. Thus Gervase had gradually become dearer to Alice; he made her life sufferable in the heavy sorrow which had desolated it.

The pale resolute face, alive with intellect and energy, and spiritualized by the worthiest passion he had known; the slight but strong figure, imposing though small, haunted her, and his voice, mellowed and deepened by feeling, rang in her ears. Most great men have been small, she remembered, and only men with voices of a certain power can directly influence democratic communities. Ought she to mar the splendid career before him for the sake of her own feelings? What had she to live for but the welfare of that family?

Then there came a sudden warmth about her heart and she seemed to see the face of Edward Annesley, aglow with the "sweet and sudden passion of youth," as she had first seen it with a kind of passionate surprise, when she looked up from her spring flowers and felt the spring-time of life stirred within her.

She could never forget that; even the crime which set their lives asunder could not quench the love which was kindled in the days of innocence. It would be a sin to marry one man when she felt this for another.

CHAPTER III.

SIBYL.

NEXT morning the new member for Medington, who only allowed himself the solace of one night at Arden in recompense for the labours of the few weeks preceding his election, left early and did not see Alice again for some time, except occasionally in the presence of others.

Although Parliament was prorogued until February, he had a great deal of political business on hand that winter; his fluent and flashy rhetoric being in great request at one or two bye-elections and club-meetings, whither he went at the instance of the ex-Minister and party chief to whom Mrs. Walter Annesley had introduced him, and who wished to make all the possible use of so keen and delicate an instrument as that he had lighted upon in Gervase Rickman.

But Gervase wrote frequently to Alice; charming letters, full of pungent reflections on the scenes and men which passed before him, full of personal confidences and kindly jests, and not too affectionate. He knew better than to reopen the question of marriage, and only occasionally alluded to hopes which lay in the future, and feelings which might never be gratified. He had made the important step of prevailing on her to entertain the idea of marrying him, he wisely left that idea to germinate silently within her mind. Impulsive, warm-hearted Sibyl had often been laughed at as a child for digging up her flower-seeds to see how they were growing; but Gervase's seeds had always been left undisturbed beneath the dark mould to fulfil their inevitable destiny, and at the same time had enjoyed more systematic watering and weeding than Sibyl's.

Mrs. Rickman now spoke to Alice of her wishes, which, of course were moulded on her son's, and even Mr. Rickman withdrew his mind for a brief space from the contemplation of scientific facts and the formulating of all sorts of theories, to tell Alice how happy she would make the evening of his life if she would marry his only son. Alice assured them that she would certainly marry no one else, and would not leave them unless they drove her forth

on the advent of a more suitable daughter-in-law. Even Mrs. Walter Annesley arrayed herself on Gervase's side, and went so far as to hint to Alice that moral suttee could scarcely be expected even of a young woman who might have married her son, especially when there was a chance of sharing and stimulating a career so brilliant as that of Gervase promised to be. A sort of paralysis of the will crept upon Alice under all this; she felt the iron power of a destiny which seemed to be closing her in on every side, and all she could do was to pray for strength to do what would work for the happiness of others.

Then something occurred which powerfully stimulated her halting purpose.

The Annesleys did not return to Gledesworth after the winter abroad which Edward had proposed as a temporary change. Their experience of living at Coventry in a country-house was too grey when contrasted with the vivid glow of Continental travel (not then so common as now); the girls acquired the habits of English Bedouins, and were seized by the strange fascination of a wealthy nomadic existence in those sunny countries which not only teem with historic association, but are the homes of art. Therefore they only returned to England for an occasional visit to London.

But Edward Annesley made it a duty to visit Gledesworth from time to time and see personally into the affairs of the property, though he was not recognized by the landed gentry, or either asked or permitted to perform any of those genial public duties which belong to that class. The cloud upon his name grew darker with time, but he continued to maintain that time would finally dissipate it. His manner changed totally during this period; he became reserved, cold, taciturn and gloomy. All this did not tend to soften his painful position among his brother-officers, who did not recognize his existence more than they were obliged by their unwritten code of etiquette. His next brother, Wilfrid, also a military man, a Royal Engineer, implored him to leave the service for his own sake, but in vain. He replied that the army was his chosen profession, and that he intended to stick to his colours, and serve his country while he could; he was not to be driven away by the clatter of a few venomous tongues, whose venom he would justify by yielding. Then he invented a gun, and was not without hope that it would one day be adopted by the authorities. At this time he looked as grim and aggressive as his own gun.

Yet there was one in whose presence his face brightened and his tongue was unloosed, and that one was Sibyl Rickman. She

sometimes visited the Annesleys in their foreign haunts, and Edward usually made his visits coincide with hers. When he paid his brief visits to Gledesworth he always went to the Manor, and whether by chance or purpose, it often befell that Sibyl was at home and Alice absent at these times. One day Gervase suddenly told him that he could not have his sister's affections trifled with any longer, and that in fact if he had no intentions he must be off at once. Edward was indignant at the supposition that Sibyl's affections had been touched, much less trifled with; but Gervase pointed out to him that the world's opinion was on his side, and that Paul Annesley was not the only person to suppose him to be smitten with Sibyl at his first visit to the Manor; that he had been taken in himself, and so undoubtedly had Sibyl. Gervase had always supposed, he said, that having thoughtlessly used Sibyl as a blind before Paul's death, Edward's subsequent attentions had been deliberate, else he would never for a moment have tolerated them.

From hot indignation Edward passed to cool reflection, and from hoping that Sibyl had never thought seriously of him, he proceeded to the notion that to win such a heart as hers would make life liveable once more. Gervase, with his accustomed discretion, had left him to digest these unwelcome observations the moment he had delivered himself of them, rightly divining that he had cast his handful of seed in a good soil.

Edward had from the first recognized Sibyl's charm and appreciated her guileless character and bright wit, and the more he thought of her the better he liked her, and the more he pondered, by the light of memory, on Gervase's hints as to her probable view of the relations between them, the more plausible did they appear to him. It was but just to Wilfrid to marry before the latter had built any decided expectations on his celibacy.

All good men like the idea of marriage in the abstract, it is only bad fellows who look with a cynical and incredulous eye upon wedded bliss (for which they are obviously unfit); Edward Annesley was no exception to this rule, knowing from his observation of mankind that the human male is vastly improved by being brought into proper subjection and tamed to the female hand.

Therefore with renewed hope he once more set forth in search of a wife.

It was on a cold Christmas Eve, the ponds were frozen and unspoilt by snow; Sibyl, who skated well, had met him more than once on the ice, and his hopes had been stimulated during the courses they had made together hand-in-hand, to the admiration

of all beholders; for Sibyl looked so happy and so pretty while skating, that it was enough to make an old man and even an old woman young to look at her.

Alice and Sibyl were busy decorating the church that winter afternoon when Edward Annesley arrived at Arden. He soon made his way to the church and looked into the hoary interior, where the gloom was intensified by the dim ray of a candle or two, and where the air was aromatic with fir and bay, and saw the two girls, with some more young people, intent on hammering up wreaths. He soon joined them and held hammers and handed wreaths about; till Sibyl left them to go to the belfry, where the despotic Raysh had compelled them to keep their material, in search of fresh wreaths. Presently he followed her, unobserved except by Raysh. Alice, at whose bidding Sibyl had gone, growing tired of waiting, after a time went to remonstrate at having to work single-handed. But Raysh, seeing her approach, waved her back from the belfry-door, which stood ajar, with a mysterious air.

"I 'lows there baint hroom for me and you in there," he said; "coorten," he added, confidentially.

Then the situation became clear to her; she could see the two figures in the light beyond the crack of the door, talking earnestly and apparently oblivious of everything around them. The evergreens were piled up inconveniently round them in obedience to the dictum of Raysh; "I caint hae my church messed up by this yer nonsense," he had grumbled, lamenting the days when he alone adorned the church, and made it look "cheerfuller and more Christmas-like" by sticking a large bough of holly in every pew, till it looked like Birnam wood marching up for devotion instead of retribution.

She had seen Edward and Sibyl skating together the day before, when she drove to the ice to fetch Sibyl home, and had heard people's comments on them with an incredulous ear, but now she was fully enlightened.

She quickly silenced Raysh, and then turned back beneath the dim, cold arches with a singing in her ears, and a fierce, hot surge of passion which surely could not be that dark and dismal thing, jealousy, in her heart, and applied herself with fierce diligence to nailing up the red-berried holly, taking a perverse pleasure in pricking her hands till they bled, and driving in the nails with an energy that made Raysh use strong language when he took them out again. Never had such strange and bitter feelings possessed her before, she did not know herself, surely her guardian angel would not have known her that day.

Does it need but some momentary touch like this, she wondered, to change the current of a character and turn light into darkness? But a few years ago in that very church she had met the summer dawn with such high resolves and feelings so different.

Her companions spoke to her, and she answered them like one who wanders in sleep; the dim and darkening church seemed unreal as the architecture of dreams; its trooping shadows and flickering spots of light oppressed her and added to the confusion which throbbed within and nearly stifled her. Her life seemed to depend on the energy with which she moved and worked; did she but pause an instant to think, she would be undone. And was it truly Sibyl who awakened such anger and scorn in the heart which loved her? And was it true that Alice once actually loved that shallow man, who was filling the measure of his faults by proving a trifler, a light of love, and a traitor?

It was only when she had exhausted her energies and torn her hands in finishing her task that better and more rational feelings came. After all, she mused, might this not be the best thing for both? Sibyl believed in him; who could tell what a purifying and ennobling influence her perfect trust and innocent love might have upon him? Sibyl might still be happy with him, being blind. So she brought herself to think after painful wrestling.

"Sibyl," Edward began without hesitation, when they were alone in the belfry, "we have been friends for a long time, and you are more dear to me every day, and I think—I hope—you care for me——" here he paused, expecting a reply, which naturally was not forthcoming. "Will you marry me?" he added, in his straightforward fashion.

Sibyl had looked up with her usual frank smile, when he entered, and went on unsuspiciously twining her ivy leaves, but when he spoke, her heart gave a great leap, all the blood flushed up into her face, and the belfry seemed to spin round and shake the great bells above her head. Something rose in her throat and choked her; she grew cold all of a sudden and looked with wistful inquiry into his face, which was earnest and eloquent with warm feeling. Then she looked down, and he waited in vain for her answer, thinking hers one of the sweetest faces that was ever seen, and went on to his downright question, to which she immediately answered "No."

"No," he echoed, somewhat taken aback by this plump and plain negative, "and I thought once—that you seemed to care for me."

Sibyl smiled, and he seemed to see Viola again,

> "I am all the daughters of my father's house,
> And yet—I know not."

"Once," she said, "I was in love with you. When I was a little, naughty girl. You were such a pretty boy and always hit everything you threw stones at. And you didn't mind being teased like poor Paul. You should have asked me then."

"But I had not sense enough then. I know that you believe in me, you told me so once."

"And I will tell you so again if you like to hear it," she replied, in her bright impetuous way.

"Thank you. You are the very sweetest little thing on the face of this perverse earth! But won't you have me? Somehow it strikes me that we should get on well together and make a pleasant-going sort of couple. You scold so charmingly." Then it was that Edward took her hands and looked down, too confidently, into the sweet face, which was tender, sad and playful all at once.

"It strikes me that we shall do nothing of the kind," she replied, withdrawing her hands with some indignation. "You don't love me," she added with a seriousness touched with reproach.

"Indeed I do."

"No, indeed you don't. You love somebody else. You have loved her for years and will love her for ever. And you *ought* to, for she is the dearest creature in the world."

"But she won't have me."

"Won't she? Try again. Wait. She is worth it."

"No, Sibyl, that chapter is closed. It is quite true that I shall never feel again as I did for her, never. But past is past. One can't live backwards. One has to go on. You and I have always been such friends; let us be more. You might make me happy, and I would try to be good to you."

He had taken her hand and led her forth from the darkening chamber beneath the bells, into the warm crimson glow of the frosty sunset, and now they slowly paced the hard footpath among the graves, until they reached the meadow above and beyond the churchyard, where the leafless elms made a fine black tracery on the deep orange sky above them.

"Oh! what tiresome, clumsy, stupid things these men are!" exclaimed Sibyl; "you don't even profess to care for me, you see. Why in the world should you want to marry me, then? You say we are good friends, let us *bide* friends then. A good

friend is better than a bad husband, which you would certainly be."

"There is nothing in the world so irritating as a woman," returned Edward, trying hard not to kiss her, and restrained by innate awe of the womanhood in which this guileless spirit was enshrined. "Just think of the comfortable quarrels we might have. As mere friends, the sphere is limited; conventionalities must be observed."

"Is this a theme for jesting?" asked Sibyl, severely. "Oh, I should hate you if I thought you had ceased to love that dear sweet creature! For pity's sake be rational."

"But you began the jesting," he remonstrated, aghast at this charge.

"Well! and I began leaving it off. Good-night. Alice is pricking her sweet fingers with no one to help her."

"Stop, Sibyl, just one word."

Sibyl stopped with an air of resignation. "I am busy, and it's cold," she said plaintively.

"Of course I shall always love her," he said earnestly, "as one loves what is too high and too far-off to reach. But, dearest Sibyl——"

"Then don't tease me any more. Who cares to hear other people made love to?"

"But, Sibyl——"

"It should always be done first-hand, and *never* talked about," she added rebukingly.

"But, Sibyl——"

"My name is Rickman. I shall never change it. I am married to my pen——"

"But I wish you could marry me, too."

"You would unwish it in a week. Now listen," said Sibyl, stopping on the crisp grass with sudden gravity. "I like you—far too well to marry you. You fancy you care enough for me to make a passable husband, but it is only friendship. In a week's time you will see that I am right. Be true to yourself, then you will be true to others."

The warm glow of the sunset had burnt away to a pale memory, a mist was floating ghost-like from the level meads beneath them, the Christmas moon had just risen and was filling the earth with a tender dreamy radiance. Sibyl's face in the pale blended lights had a new and unexpected beauty; her rich tints were subdued and the lustre of her dark eyes intensified.

What was the secret charm which so irresistibly drew him to her? It was very different from the deep inevitable and

inextinguishable feelings which bound him to Alice. Something told him that Sibyl knew him better than he knew himself, her deep liquid eyes seemed to be gazing into the depths of his soul and discovering recesses closed even to him. What was the secret of her power? Was it genius? His brain was full of lyric snatches from the little volume of poems which had just appeared in Sibyl's name, and they had seemed to his not exigent judgment to have the ring of true song, they had further suggested revelations of Sibyl's own heart. Her earnest glance spoke a thousand unspeakable things, it revealed the guileless soul of a gentle Viola, yet with all its tenderness it scarcely concealed the swift lightnings of a spirit full of mirth. While he gazed, his own spirit began to clear and he saw that she was right. He saw that his feeling for her, though in that moment she had acquired a dearness that she never had before, was not one to justify marriage or forbode a happy union. He saw, too, that deeply as he had pressed his love for Alice down into the lowest hold in his heart, he could not stifle it; above all the disappointment, chagrin and resentment, her refusal and want of faith had caused him, and above all more tender and gracious feelings, he had that strong sense of oneness with her, which is only felt once and cannot end. He knew now that the dream Gervase had called into existence was vain, and that the double life with all its cares and joys and perturbations was not for him, since Alice was beyond reach.

"Dear Sibyl," he said, after a pause, "I think you are one of the sweetest creatures God ever made! I will be true to you, at least. And I think we shall be friends all our lives long."

"I think we shall," replied Sibyl, with a little tender smile. Then they clasped hands and parted.

She went slowly back through the chill silver of the aërial moonbeams, her breath visible in the frosty air, and the frozen grass rebounding stiffly from beneath her light steps, and met Alice and the Mertons coming out of the dark church, the deep blackness of which was still emphasized by a few dim lights. The clear evening sky into which pale stars were slowly stealing, the grey church with its steep red roof and massive tower, the village with its red lighted windows, the bare trees all sleeping in the moonshine, the faces looking unearthly in the bluish light, the associations of Christmas Eve which threw a hallowed glory over all, everything seemed sweet and full of unspeakable charm to Sibyl. The hour she had just passed was the flower of all her life, and she was content; her heart was like a sleeping babe, perfect in its deep sweet repose.

She scarcely heard the "good-nights" of the Mertons when they turned in at their gate, but with her hand in Alice's arm walked silently home, her looks communing with the serene clear heavens. Alice was quiet too, but it was with a different quietness. They went into the kitchen to see the mummers acting their primitive play from house to house; but Sibyl did not enter into the homely jests as usual; it was as if she had let her spirit pass away with the mystic glories of the twilight and only her body remained. They listened to the carol-singing, and sat round the hall-fire till midnight, but Sibyl said nothing to any one of her twilight ramble. Alice wondered at her silence, and was vaguely pained and disappointed, and when Gervase in bidding her "good-night" pressed her hand lingeringly, she returned the pressure, and was glad to think there was at least one on whom she could absolutely rely, and whose care for her nothing could abate.

CHAPTER IV.

SPIRITS.

ALTHOUGH the one dream which promised brightness to his clouded life had just been dissipated, Edward Annesley drove back to Gledesworth in no despondent frame of mind. The evening sky shone with a holier lustre than usual; his horse seemed to fly like some air-borne immortal charger, instead of prosaically trotting over the hard roads. It was as if he had attempted to enter a room full of music and mirth, and had found himself instead in the dim cool spaces of some hoary cathedral, listening to solemn prayer cadences and deep organ thunders.

When he reached home he found a card with a half-forgotten name upon it, "Major McIlvray," and was told that the Major, hearing he would return that evening, had promised to call again on the chance of finding him, which he did.

Major McIlvray's regiment had been sent on foreign service a few months after the death of Paul Annesley, with whom he had become well acquainted after his first introduction to him at the meet at the Traveller's Rest. He had recently returned to England, and was stationed at a large garrison town, within two hours of Gledesworth, whence he had come that day intending to return before night. At one time Edward Annesley had been in the habit of meeting Major McIlvray constantly, and had been on sufficiently intimate terms with him to find fault with him and turn his foibles into good-humoured ridicule; but he had now become such a solitary, that he scarcely remembered how to welcome friends, and received the Major with a grim coldness that would have discomfited most people, looking at him as much as to say, "What on earth do you want?"

Major McIlvray was not easily rebuffed; he did not appear to notice the coldness of his reception, and sat by the fire with his usual composure, making commonplace observations in the spasmodic drawl which he affected, and secretly studying Edward's face, and comparing him with his former self.

When he heard that he was passing the night at the village inn,

Edward asked him to transfer his quarters to Gledesworth, which he at once consented to do, to the surprise of Annesley, who only asked him as a matter of form, a form he had almost forgotten to use, so much of a recluse had he become.

"My mother," said Major McIlvray, "remembers meeting you at some dance at her house. You came up from Aldershot with me. Glad if you would call when in town."

"She is very good. I don't—visit much," he replied.

"Find it a bore? So do I. But do as Romans do."

The blood rushed darkly to Edward's face. McIlvray had not been long in England, he remembered; it was probable that he had heard nothing of the imputation which rested upon him. Yet Lady McIlvray was in the way of hearing it. He relapsed again into the grimness which McIlvray's friendliness had for a moment dissipated, and began to wonder to what he was indebted for this unexpected visit. Presently his guest observed that there were a great many liars in the world. But Edward remembered that David had made a more sweeping observation to the same purpose, and he had himself discovered the fact so early in life as to think it too obvious for comment.

During dinner Major McIlvray said that he had heard so much scandal since his return that he was sick of it. Edward turned hot again and looked fiercely across the table so as to meet the other's eyes. But that other went on tranquilly enjoying his dinner, and spoke of Colonel Disney and other artillery officers whom he had been meeting recently, and of the changes and promotions which had occurred among them.

"Never believe a word I hear," he added with apparent inconsequence, "especially when I know it to be lies."

Annesley asked him point-blank if he had heard any rumours respecting him.

"Heard them all," he replied tranquilly. "Widiculous bosh. Disney an old woman."

This was comforting. Once he had despised McIlvray as a shallow coxcomb full of affectations, redeemed by some good points. Yet he had such solid stuff in him as refused to be turned from belief in a friend.

"Wanted you to leave the service," the Highlander continued. "Wespect you for not giving in."

Yet Annesley's mind misgave him; McIlvray might not have heard all, he too might come to disbelieve in him. He frankly told McIlvray that he was the only man who fully discredited the imputations that were cast upon him, and something in the unexpected loyalty of this undemonstrative *nil admirari* spirit

touched him to such an extent, that he let something escape of the bitterness which weighed upon him.

"Soon live it down. Nothing like pluck," McIlvray commented; and after that the evening passed swiftly and pleasantly, such an evening of frank companionship as Annesley had not enjoyed for years.

Whether it was the influence of the genial season, or of that potent national beverage which expands the hearts and stimulates the wits of North Britons, is uncertain, but something effected a transformation in Major McIlvray that Christmas Eve. The enthusiastic Celt emerged from beneath the thin veneer of what for want of a better name may be called the languid swell. In those days the masher was not; the beau, the dandy, the blood, the buck, and the exquisite had long since passed into shadowy memories; but the swell, the heavy swell, diffused a gracious fragrance upon the air of Piccadilly, and entranced the beholder by the graceful sweep of his whiskers, the calculated curl of his moustache, the slimness of his umbrella, the scantiness of his vocabulary, the immovable gravity of his demeanour, and his impenetrable indifference to all things terrestrial and celestial. He alone among the sons of men attempted to practise the doctrines preached by the garrulous sage of Chelsea on the ineffable beauty of silence, reducing such speech as necessity forced from him to an elegant minimum, and diminishing the necessary occasions of speech still further, by the simple process of not thinking.

Major McIlvray was one of this brotherhood, the lineal descendant of Alcibiades and Agag, a swell of the first water. Though apparently incapable of the rough and virile consonant *r*, to which his tongue imparted the feminine softness of a liquid *w*, this evening the whiskey, or some more ethereal spirit, brought out a fine manly Highland burr in his speech with a fine manly interest in things in general, together with that indescribable imaginative exaltation which is inseparable from the men of the kilt and tartan. His eyes became dreamy, they seemed to gaze at far-off things; the breath of the moor and the loch seemed to sigh through his strongly aspirated speech; he spoke of eerie legends, of haunted corries and pools, of wraiths and apparitions, and of the strange gift of second-sight. But this point was only reached when they were smoking a final cigar towards midnight and listening for the carol-singers. The less imaginative mind of his host, whose Saxon stolidity was dissipated by no more whiskey than good fellowship demanded, was nevertheless sympathetic to these weird themes to an extent that still further stimulated

McIlvray, until a listener might have been beguiled into seeing spectral forms in mist-wreathed tartans, and playing upon shadowy bagpipes, floating by the windows in the silent night, and people of weak nerves would have hesitated to leave that solitary firelit chamber for the lonely, echoing corridors of the great empty house, in which only two or three rooms were now ever occupied. An Annesley in the iron armour of Commonwealth days looked down upon the two men by the fire from his frame on the wall with a sardonic grin, which might have been imagination or the flicker of the leaping fire-light, but which was distinctly perceptible to McIlvray, who asked the history of the grim warrior, and entered with zest into the story of the Gledesworth curse, and was amazed at the present Annesley's proposition of selling it. "I don't suppose it would fetch much," the latter added, "but I should like to get rid of it at any price."

Major McIlvray gazed horror-struck upon him and took some more whiskey; the Cromwellian Annesley seemed to frown darkly, while his hand apparently moved towards the hilt of his great sword.

The living Annesley looked at the fire in silence for a few seconds and then spoke, as one who longs, yet fears, to disburden himself of a secret.

"And you are really convinced that it was your brother's wraith you saw that day when the mist lifted from the hill?" he asked.

"Perfectly. He died at that hour precisely."

Annesley paused again, then he began to narrate what had occurred to him in the previous summer.

It was on the shores of Lake Leman; he was making an excursion with his sisters and brother from Veytaux to the hills above it. They had walked far, resting at mid-day in a pine-wood; it was now evening, and they were sitting on some broken ground just below the Dent de Jaman, making their evening meal off bread and cheese and thin white wine procured from a châlet near. All were facing the lake, which spread far beneath them, beautiful in the long slanting radiance of the setting sun, above the lake towered the massive pile of the Dent du Midi, its seven snowy peaks rose-red in the sinking light.

"We shall see the *Alpen-Glühn* to-night," said Sibyl Rickman, who was one of the party; "look at the Midi."

Thus they were all looking, when Annesley became aware of something which made the hair of his flesh stand up.

He was behind the others and on slightly higher ground, thus

the falling and passing of a swift shadow breaking the western sunbeams touched him alone, and he turned and saw—a face. The dark blue eyes burning with inward fire, the black crisp hair, the scar on the cheek were unmistakable, and had not changed apparently since the day he last saw them, the day of Paul Annesley's death.

For it was truly the face of Paul, though clean-shaven, and the head of Paul, though tonsured and rising from the dress of a monk; the long white robe glowing incandescent in the sun's rich light; the passionless features wearing an unearthly calm were those of a monk, yet how should a monk have the dark, blazing, blue eyes and scarred face of Paul Annesley?

Edward Annesley's heart stood still and his mouth grew parched as he gazed, but an instant truly,—for the phantom figure passed swiftly and silently without pause,—yet an instant in which his thoughts were so many and so disquieting that it seemed an eternity. The white figure, after the one brief burning gaze in passing, vanished behind the rocky broken ground; but as soon as Annesley could shake off the nightmare-stiffness which paralysed his limbs, he too disappeared behind the broken mass and saw or thought he saw a ghost-like figure, sinking rapidly down the declivity of the little ravine beneath him, from which the sun had already disappeared. Down the declivity Edward dashed, but the figure was nowhere to be seen, a far-off white streak proved on closer inspection to be a waterfall. A black fir-wood lay in the direction the phantom had taken; into this Annesley plunged, his blood was up now and he was determined to know the cause of this temporary cheating of the senses. The wood climbed a slope facing the east; it was nearly night there in the thick and heavy shadows. The phantom monk was nowhere to be seen; Edward had now made a long and hot pursuit and the distant *jödeln* of his brother warned him that there was no time to lose in rejoining his party, whose way lay in the opposite direction and who already bid fair to be belated.

So he was obliged to return, pale and breathless and unable to give a rational account of his sudden flight; for, upon asking the others if they had seen a white monk go by, they laughed and told him he had been dreaming and rallied him unmercifully upon his distraught appearance. He therefore said no more, but descended the hill-side full of disquieting thoughts, and from that moment had never opened his lips upon the subject till now.

"Why should my cousin's spirit appear to me?" he asked

Major McIlvray at the close of his narrative. "In all your stories, there was a purpose in the apparition—a warning of some kind."

"It was not Paul Annesley's spirit," returned McIlvray with decision.

"Then what was it?" asked Annesley, whose nerves were still quivering from the memories he had just evoked, and who was surprised at the scepticism displayed by so ardent a ghost-seer as Major McIlvray.

"That was very strange that he should come as a monk," replied McIlvray, who, in spite of his scepticism, was excited by the story, "very strange. He was not a Catholic even, why would he appear as a monk? No, Annesley, it was not a spirit, that passing figure. It was a living monk that was passing, and his eyes were dark blue and some mark was on his face, and in that moment he was very like Paul Annesley. I have met a man who was very like me. He was in the Hussars; it was sometimes unpleasant, such mistakes were made. Or, I will tell you; you had been thinking, thinking of that poor fellow, your cousin, and a bird was flying past making a shadow, and you turned quickly; the sunshine was dazzling and your imagination painted the face of Paul Annesley on the air. You had been seeing these white Carthusians in France, and you were thinking, it may be, of spirits and white garments, and so you embodied all in one figure of your cousin in a monk's garb. Yes; that is how it would be," he added with an air of conviction as he relighted the cigar, which in his excitement had been suffered to go out, "that is how it would all happen."

The explanation though logical was inconsistent in a man who believed in second-sight and apparitions, and it did not convince the more practical and literal mind of Annesley.

"It was the face of Paul Annesley," he repeated. "His was no common face, and it is beyond possibility that another face should be marked with that peculiar scar. I am as certain that he looked me face to face that night as I am certain that I am the owner of this house."

McIlvray smiled and looked thoughtfully into the fire for a moment before he spoke. "That is, indeed, being certain," he then said, "I will dispute no more. But it is strange that no one believes like an unbeliever. For you said to-night, that you did not believe in apparitions."

"Or in the curse of Gledesworth," Edward replied with a faint smile. "It is true, McIlvray, that nothing is so consistent as inconsistency."

"Well! I will tell you one thing," continued McIlvray. "If I were in your place I would never speak of this thing again."

"I never shall," he replied, frozen back to his usual reserve by this unexpected incredulity. The last of the final cigars was by this time smoked. The night was wearing on into Christmas morning and they went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

THE VACANT CHAIR.

ALICE soon heard what had taken place in the twilight of Christmas Eve. The fact that Mrs. Rickman had been told of Edward Annesley's intentions towards her daughter, and that Sibyl had been obliged to confess to her mother that she could not entertain his proposals, was sufficient to ensure Alice's knowledge of the whole history. Mrs. Rickman's nature was transparent and sympathetic; all her innocent thoughts and guileless hopes and fears were shared with those abo t her, and Alice, upon whom she depended most, enjoyed the most ample share of her confidences. Until Mrs. Rickman had "talked things over" with some sympathetic listener, she was unable to get any firm mental grasp of facts.

"I cannot understand Sibyl," her mother commented to Alice, "she was evidently struck with him from the first. Every one noticed it, and we all thought his visits were for her. Your uncle was thunderstruck when he asked for you, and I have always thought, my dear, and so has Gervase, that some little jealousy or pique occasioned that proposal, especially as you had never given him the slightest encouragement. There are many things against the match, it is true; but Sibyl is not so young as she was, and she really is very blue, poor dear! Her father and I sadly fear that she will be an old maid. And I cannot help thinking that she cares for him."

"If she did, it would be her secret, not ours," Alice said. "Let us not discuss it; it is not fair. Perhaps it may take place after all," she added, inconsequently, "especially if not talked about."

Gervase's anger was too deep for words when he learnt that Sibyl had deliberately thrown away the chance of happiness that he had so carefully plotted and arranged for her. He was still firmly convinced that no other marriage would be possible to her, and this conviction was confirmed by a carefully guarded conversation he had with her, a conversation in which, as far as words went, she proved more than a match for him. But when people know each other as well as this brother knew his sister,

words are but clumsy symbols of thought, especially when associated with such a tell-tale face as Sibyl's, a face upon which the slightest emotion raised a corresponding change of colour and outline. He was angry with Sibyl for thus unexpectedly crossing his purpose, but, of course, he was far more angry with Annesley, and attributed the failure of his suit to some clumsiness on his part.

"These good-looking fools do at least know how to make love commonly," he thought. He even hinted this want of dexterity vaguely to Alice, who quickly made him see that the subject was not one to which she would permit any reference.

With February came the opening of Parliament, and the fluttering interest of seeing Gervase's name in the debates, all of which Mr. Rickman now read regularly for the first time in his life. Politics now ran high at Arden Manor, although a singular unanimity of party feeling prevailed; no meal was taken without the spice of those magic names, Disraeli, Gladstone and Bright. When Alice went for a few weeks to stay with Mrs. Walter Annesley, and accompany her on a short visit to London, the same political enthusiasm, centreing about the same individual, prevailed at her table, and the two ladies one night went to the Ladies' Gallery and were eye-witnesses to the spectacle of Gervase in the act of serving his country. Alice subsequently narrated the details of this moving scene to the hero's parents; told how he sat at ease with folded arms on one of the comfortable benches, and listened to a long debate, sometimes making notes, and sometimes yawning till the tears came into his eyes, and how, when a division occurred, he solemnly went on his own side and did his duty like a man. And somehow the more Gervase was deified by those dear old people, the more warmly did Alice feel towards him, and the more enthusiastic Sibyl waxed upon the political topics which were especially her brother's, the dearer both brother and sister became to her.

Then a great sorrow visited that tranquil hearth; Mrs. Rickman's guileless and simple spirit passed away, after a brief sharp illness.

Hers was one of those unselfish and unsophisticated natures that make little stir and emphasis in life, natures which people take for granted, of the beauty of which they are not conscious until they pass away, leaving a blank that nothing can fill. She always had good health, and her sudden illness, though it surprised every one as an unaccustomed event, caused no alarm in the house, until one night when the doctor said that her son must

come immediately if he wished to see her alive. In her last moments she spoke to Alice of Gervase, and said how much she had their marriage at heart, and Alice could but say that she would think of her last wishes, and so give the parting spirit peace.

Almost paralysed by the shock of this bereavement, they sat round the hearth the night after the funeral, and each almost wondered why the familiar figure did not come in and take the accustomed armchair. Mr. Rickman, aged and broken, sat in the opposite chair; Alice was by his side, and Sibyl, exhausted by the tempestuous grief to which she had given free vent, sat on the rug at her feet with her head supported against Alice, who with one hand stroked the daughter's feverish cheek, and with the other fondled the stricken father's hand. Gervase sat by Alice in front of the fire, pale and silent as the others.

Like many an only son, he had graciously and as a matter of course accepted his mother's affection, which at times had even bored him, and when the final scene occurred, he gave little outward token of grief, beyond one brief cry which seemed torn from him of, "Now she will never know." He made all necessary arrangements with perfect calm, and supported his broken, half-stupefied father through the most trying scenes without once losing his own self-control. Now all was done that could be done, life was about to resume its everyday aspect, he was to leave them the next morning, and there the bereaved family sat, silent with sorrow, and the slow minutes dragged heavily on. Alice tried at first to get them to talk, and started several commonplace topics; but Mr. Rickman seemed too dazed by his trouble, Sibyl too exhausted, and Gervase too full of thought to listen to her, so she desisted, and contented herself with the comfort she knew Mr. Rickman and Sibyl derived from the silent touch of her hands. Her own grief was perhaps as deep as Sibyl's, though more silent, and it pained her a little that the being most dear to the dead, Gervase, was the least affected by her loss. His sphinx-like face, on which she almost feared to gaze at this time, gave no clue to what was passing within, yet she thought that perhaps more sorrow than people suspected was concealed by it, and wondered at the savage suppression men put upon their feelings, whenever they are in the least degree creditable to them.

While she was thus musing, Gervase in his stony silence had been realizing what his mother was to him and how irretrievable was his loss. Old memories and events of his boyhood had been rising before him, he had almost forgotten the silent companions of his grief, when suddenly, stirred by some unusually poignant recollection, he began to sob with vehemence.

This thrilled through the hearts of the others with pain, not unmixed with a comforting warmth. The old man, whose grief was beyond tears, stirred, sighed, and shook his head; Sibyl sprang up and threw her arms round her brother; Alice felt a stronger movement of the heart towards Gervase in his sudden abandonment to his grief than she had ever felt before; she felt, too, that that moment made her his.

He quickly mastered himself and recovered his usual self-control. Sibyl did the same, and Alice feared to give him the token of sympathy that her heart desired, lest he should again give way. So they sat on in silence as before; yet not quite as before, for each felt a fresh bond in that spasm of common anguish, and presently Gervase left the room in silence, and returned no more that night. The next morning he bid the three good-bye, and though he said nothing, and sought no private interview, he knew by the look in Alice's face that his heart's desire was obtained at last, and went away comforted.

Alice devoted herself to Sibyl and Mr. Rickman, who was too crushed for a long time to take any interest in his scientific pursuits, and only went into his study to sit idly brooding in his chair. She brought him beetles, plants, and strange stones to no effect, until at last she contrived to purchase a very rare old coin for him.

This roused him, his eyes kindled at the sight of the treasure, which he eagerly took and carefully examined, and Alice was amply rewarded for the pains she had taken to hunt out and buy the coin by hearing him start off in his old familiar fashion on a long and learned lecture on the coin, and the days in which it was struck. The next thing was to get some one to dispute its genuineness, and this with some diplomacy Alice and Sibyl contrived between them; a hot discussion raged, letters were written in antiquarian journals, and finally a long pamphlet was begun.

Then it was that Mr. Rickman began to talk of his loss, a sure sign that the worst sting of it was past; and one day he told Alice that he should not live long, but that his one hope was to see his son happily married and his grandchild born before he died.

Spring days were growing bright, Gervase had written to say he should be at the Manor next day, and Alice fully realized that she must now definitely and irrevocably bind herself.

In the last few years she had deeply pondered the mystery of life, and the ends and aims of human existence, pondered them as the young never do and never can, save under the discipline of heavy sorrow and distracting doubt. Ever since the fateful day of Paul Annesley's death she had ceased to take everything for

granted, and to expect sunshine and mirth as the natural inevitable ingredients of life; she had descended into the hell of suffering and there searched deeply for the few realities which lie hidden under the multiform masks and phantasms which surround eager youth on every side. To earthly happiness she had been called to bid a sorrowful farewell, and having rid herself of that expectation of joy which makes life so complex, she had been free to consider in those silent and dark depths that, after all, life has but one problem to offer, how to do one's duty.

This how had caused her much conflict, conflict continually settled by the urgency of some near and obvious duty, which circumstance presented to her and which she devoutly welcomed. But now that circumstance seemed to offer her one supreme sacrifice, now that a life rich in possibilities needed hers and the decisive moment had arrived, the sacrifice seemed too hard, the secret inmost self revolted against it.

She went into the dim silence of the shadowy church; she looked at the tablet to Paul Annesley's memory; she recalled her vigil in that church, which ended in the rosy summer dawn; she visited her adopted mother's fresh grave. Then she went to the belfry and conjured back the vision of Edward and Sibyl among the Christmas hollies, when Edward had asked Sibyl to be his wife.

This was in the afternoon, and when she returned from her solitary pilgrimage, Gervase was just arriving. That evening there was joy once more beneath the beloved roof; Gervase and Alice were formally engaged. Mr. Rickman sat by the fire with a satisfied air, contemplating the figure of Alice at the piano accompanying Gervase, who stood near her, on his violin.

Sibyl sat near with clasped hands, and eyes full of tears. She refused to interrupt their music with her own singing; they were playing so exquisitely, she said. And Alice's soul was at peace.

They could not be married for some months, and it was agreed to say nothing of the engagement for the present. They were to live at Arden when not in London, Mr. Rickman and Sibyl remaining with them in separate apartments, which the size of the house permitted, though of course great changes and re-fittings would have to be made. Gervase had virtually retired from legal practice, though his name remained in the firm, and he was bound to see those clients who could not dispense with him. After all, there was not much wrong with human affairs, he reflected. His purposes were in the main being effected. He had his heart's desire; he could bid his soul be merry and take its ease, because much goods were laid up for it, and he heard no deep low voice murmuring in the ear of conscience, "Thou fool!"

CHAPTER VI.

BENEDICTION.

EDWARD ANNESLEY paid one or two visits to Arden Manor in the course of the spring. Those visits did not materially strengthen the hope Sibyl's words had kindled in him at Christmas; yet the hope survived.

One day when he was calling in the summer, he expressed some surprise at the crowd of workmen he saw, and the complete upsetting of the house that was taking place. "I wonder that you stay on in all this turmoil," he said; "why don't you take your father away until the work is finished, Sibyl?"

"We like to see to the new arrangements ourselves," Sibyl replied, not knowing that he had not yet heard of the engagement which all the country side had fully discussed during the last few weeks; for the approaching marriage could no longer be kept secret in the face of these preparations.

"I don't like new arrangements, myself," he added, quite innocently; "I hate a freshly decorated house."

Alice changed colour and rose with an air of vexation to gather a flower; for they were all sitting out of doors to avoid the inconveniences within.

Mr. Rickman hereupon began a long digression upon the passing of one generation and coming of another, made some observations upon marriage customs in various times and places, and said that he thought civilization, while tending to diminish special wedding ceremonies, increased the actual amount of family disturbance involved by a marriage. By this time a hazy notion that somebody was going to be married had penetrated to Edward's brain, but he was not prepared for the shock of Mr. Rickman's final words, "Gervase and Alice are to have the main body of the house, Sibyl and I will be content with the west wing yonder."

Edward looked Alice full in the face with a gaze that stirred her new-born peace to the depths and haunted her long after. All the blood went from his face, leaving it grey and rigid for a moment. Then he looked down at the grass at his feet, speechless; the rest were at a loss what to do or say, until he looked up

again with a little sarcastic laugh and apologized for not having offered his congratulations before, observing that the intelligence was quite new to him.

No one enjoyed that scene, and everybody was glad when he rose and took his leave.

"Gervase!" he said to himself, as he walked rapidly down the lane beneath the green elms, "Gervase!" Every time he uttered that clever young lawyer's name he ground his teeth and struck viciously at the innocent cow-parsley on the banks with his riding-whip, and he uttered it many times, and each time more indignantly than before, on his way from the Manor to the Golden Horse, where his horse was waiting. But why that worthy man should not marry Alice Lingard, if she had a mind to have him, he could not exactly say, nor why he should have a dim sense of having been outwitted, befooled, and cheated by that thoughtful and resolute person.

Many memories now appeared in a new light and made him uncomfortable; the remembrance of Gervase's strong assertions that Alice would never recover from Paul's loss, of his assurances that hers was not a nature to forget, that it was a kind of insult to Paul's memory to think of marrying her, the remembrance of those proceedings on Gervase's part which had led him to offer himself to Sibyl and be rejected. These and many other circumstances, and particularly a remark of Major McIlvray's made at Christmas to the effect that Rickman intended from the first to marry Alice, stirred the most hateful feelings within him, feelings which he could not easily dismiss.

After all, was it Gervase's fault if neither of the ladies of Arden Manor would accept him? Was Gervase to be censured for paying court to the sweetest of women whom he was constantly seeing, when he knew that she had definitely rejected him, Edward Annesley? Yet he was indignant with Alice for choosing Rickman; though he could give no reason why she should not. Most people would say that Rickman was the better match, but all the same he could not admire her taste.

Feeling betrayed and deserted, relieving his mind by recalling all the severe and sarcastic sentences he had read or heard of the frailty and fickleness of women, and blaming even Sibyl in his haste for the false hopes she had rekindled in him, he put his horse into a canter and then got him on the short down-turf, and let him have his head until the downs were passed and the horse completely blown.

Then when the horse walked listlessly with hanging head through the park, he reflected that Alice's marriage was the only remedy,

bitter though it was, for the state into which he had fallen; now finally he should be cured once for all of his unfortunate attachment.

That day he left Gledesworth, and, a few weeks later, England, to join his family on a tour through the north of France.

"I really think Edward gets grimmer and grimmer," his sister Eleanor observed one day, during this tour; "I wish he would remember that other people want to be happy if he doesn't."

"Poor fellow! he has had more trouble than you think, Nellie, don't be hard upon him," her mother replied, "and he does everything he can to give us pleasure."

"That is just what I complain of," replied his sister, "he never indulges in an original wish. It is always 'Just where you like, Nell,' with a sort of martyred resignation, or 'Well then, we will go to Rouen, I have no choice,' and one may change one's mind eight times in a minute without making him lose his temper. I could box his ears sometimes. How I should hate to be married to a man of such maddening good-temper!"

"Major McIlvray is certainly very different," said Harriet, in her guileless way. "Do you remember how he persisted in going to St. Peter's last Easter Day, and would have gone without us if we had not given in."

"Oh, yes! Major McIlvray," replied Eleanor, blushing in spite of her disdainful air, "his head was quite turned on the subject of monks. He never saw one during the whole of his stay in Rome without turning to look at him. The functions he went to for the sake of studying his beloved monks! He was quite rude on one occasion."

"McIlvray rude, Nell?" asked Edward, coming into the room; "you must have snubbed him very severely. A worm will turn sometimes."

"Well! he *was* rude. He left us in a shop one day when a procession was going by. He rushed out, saying something about a monk with a scar on his face, and did not return until we had finished our shopping and gone home alone."

"And what did he say about this monk?" asked Edward.

"Oh, nothing. He had made a mistake, or some rubbish. Come, Ted, do propose something for this afternoon."

"Well!" he replied, with a pre-occupied air, "would you like to go to church?"

"To that sweet old church we passed yesterday? Why not? Is there any service?"

"Yes, the landlady tells me there will be vespers at four and a sermon. She cannot say what kind of preacher, because the *curé*

is ill and a stranger is taking his place. The choir, she tells me, is heavenly. Her son Armand sings in it, which no doubt accounts for its excellence."

"You are becoming almost cynical, Ned; it is quite refreshing. Who is for church then? We three? I am ready."

"So am I," said the younger sister, and they started and strolled along the village street in the hot August afternoon, keeping well under the shade of the houses and trees.

When they reached the little old church, Edward said that if his sisters did not mind he would wait for them outside, he did not feel in the right frame of mind for a sermon. Sometimes a very little thing inspires one with a strong and unreasonable repugnance; such a repugnance he felt at entering the dark, cool little church, into which the more devout villagers were passing by twos and threes. Was he growing whimsical in his gloom, he wondered; what difference could an hour spent in a church make one way or the other to him?

So his sisters went in alone, and, leaving the churchyard, he strolled up the hillside on which the church was built and found a shady seat under a pear-tree, whence he could see the low-lying village with its pointed red roofs, and the old church with its red-tiled spire above it. Below this rising ground was a broad level country with long lines of poplars marking the high road, and a tranquil river winding placidly through the unfenced fields, where the corn stood yellowing for the sickle, and cattle pastured, and the strong oxen rested from their toil. Music came faintly from a holiday-boat on the river and the voices of loungers in Sunday dress were heard now and then in a snatch of song or burst of laughter from below, otherwise the silence of August brooded over the wide sunny land—even the church-bell was still.

The level country through which the blue river flowed so peacefully, stretched away and away into infinite distance, till its vague blueness melted into the deep azure of the cloudless sky. The dreamy fascination of the broad unvaried levels is something like the stronger charm of the wide sea, and the silence of the plains awes the listener, though in a different manner, as the unceasing music of the waves does; both conduce to reverie, and suggest far-off thoughts. Half an hour quickly passed away in the charmed silence, which was scarcely interrupted by the organ-music and chanting of vespers rising, hushed by distance, from the church, and many thoughts passed through Edward's mind as he sat alone in the leafy shade. If Alice had married Paul he could have borne it, for she loved him; but the idea of this marriage with Gervase was insupportable; her face, as he had

last seen it that summer day at Arden, haunted him; it was not that of a happy bride. Why had she accepted "that fellow?" There was some mystery which he could never hope to fathom. Everything was going wrong, he thought.

Wherever he had come in contact with other lives he had brought trouble; he had deprived Alice of the lover of her youth, and she had drifted into this loveless marriage which promised no joy. In moments of despondence, the thought of Paul's fate was wont to sting him with a keen reproach. The outward reproach was more painful to one of his frank, open-hearted nature than any one suspected, but that which continually recurred within, the feeling of having caused the death of one bound to him by so many ties, was far worse. He did not yield to it; he was not one to waste strength over what could not be altered, but there were times when the sense of being overshadowed by some malign influence against which nothing availed oppressed him, and almost made him believe in the Gledesworth curse. At such times he saw the face of his aunt, her cold eyes alight with anger, when she pronounced the double curse upon him, and only with stout striving could he shake off this waking nightmare. To-day was such a time of weakness, of painful memories and despondent forecasts. If only the dead could return, if he could but see Paul Annesley alive once more, he thought with a desperate yearning, for the futility of which he scorned himself.

But brooding over the irrevocable was as useless as it was weak, so he rose and went back to the church, where, as he supposed, some good man was trying to show people the way to walk through this dark and devious world. But the sermon was over, and the music told him that Benediction had begun.

It was refreshing to dip the finger into the holy-water stoup, and to change the broad blaze of sunshine without for the cool shadows within, where the soft mellow music rose and floated through the incense-laden air. He stole noiselessly in, and took up his station near the entrance by a massive pillar cool to the touch, and listened to the subdued singing of the "Salutaris Hostia." When he raised his head and glanced over the church, all was at first dark to his sun-dazzled eyes, as religion is to people blinded by the fierce glare of worldliness. Gradually he made out the forms of women in great white caps, children, a man in blouse and sabots, a bourgeoise or two, the slim figures of his sisters, fair-haired and conspicuous in fresh white dresses. Some stray sunbeams here and there shot a long thick-moted shaft across nave and chancel, on the high altar the golden vessel

containing the Host glittered unveiled. How like and how unlike it was to a village church at home! How like and how unlike were the rustic worshippers, people who toiled much and had many sorrows and fears and more happiness than they knew, to whom creeds were little, and true religion much, people who were there from habit and in deference to public opinion, or who sought in the quiet and consecrated place balm for bitter sorrow and guidance in dire perplexities! Thus far the English villagers and the French were alike, they only differed outwardly and in their way of expressing these things. And the priest? He could not see this priest's face in the gloom; he would differ from the English country parson more widely than the rural parishioners of both nations differed from each other.

A second motet began, and fell with a healing charm upon Edward's soothed ears; good thoughts came into his mind, vague aspirations after a better life. Stern Protestant though he was, he acknowledged that this sacred singing of hymns in an unknown tongue might lift up the heart, and be better than nothing. Then came the final hymn, incense floated, the priest, mounting a ladder and taking the Sacrament in his hands, faced the people in the act of benediction; the solemn moment had arrived and all bowed down.

> "The shrill bell rings, the censer swings,
> And solemn chants resound between."

But Edward, while he knelt, looked up full in the face of the priest; a face calm with the unearthly calm of the cloister, yet marked with the traces of past storm; a remarkable face, in which the inextinguishable fire of the eyes belied the unnatural stillness of the features; a face in the summer of life, crowned with dark hair and scarred; a face seldom absent from the gazer's memory—the face of Paul Annesley.

The church seemed to swim in a flood of lurid light; the figure of the priest to shudder away as figures do in dreams; all became vague save the burning radiance of the deep-blue eyes, and the golden vessel making the sign of the cross in the trembling hands. The chanting of the choir sounded faint and strange, pierced as it was by the silver sound of the bell; the incense seemed to intoxicate and overwhelm; everything came to a blank void for a time, and then all was natural again, and with a clear gaze, though with a heavily-throbbing heart, Edward saw in the calm features of the priest in the act of benediction, the familiar face he had last seen ablaze with passion, and hungry for his life.

He was quite sure, soberly certain. Those tremulous hands now blessing the people with the holy Sacrament were the same then laid with murderous purpose upon him. Those eyes, with the startled, pained, intent gaze into his, were the same which glowed upon him then with blind fury. He who had been dead was alive again, standing before him: no phantom, for never phantom gazed with such human pain, but a living, breathing, suffering man.

PART VI.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BRINK.

THE tyrant Time, who wastes and destroys so relentlessly in his flight, whose swift onrush no power may stay, when once past becomes the slave of thought and imagination. The chronicler bids him advance and retire at will; he waves his magic rod and it is no more the hour of Benediction in the little French village. Five years roll back, and Paul Annesley, having left his friends at the river's source, is speeding down the hilly path like one chased by demons.

He was in such a tempest of confused passion on that day that he scarcely knew what he was doing; as men are drunk with excess of wine, so was he drunk with the excess into which unchecked passions always run more or less. He had never tried to bridle himself; he could not do so now; the evil in him had grown to such mastering might. As men drunk with wine can give no clear account of their actions when sobered, so it was with him. He never knew afterwards precisely why he left the party of friends at the spring, or what had been his exact purpose in following the downward path in such hot haste; he could only recall, as one recalls the incidents in a dreadful dream, a chaos of fierce despair within him, lighted as by a flash of fire by the cheery sound of a man's voice singing in the careless gaiety of a heart at ease—

"There we lay, all the day,
In the Bay of Biscay O."

The blithe singing kindled a dreadful impulse in his heart and stimulated his mind to unnatural activity. It made him remember the nature of the ground lower down. Something whispered to him not to overtake the singer, but to dash with silent swiftness into the wood and wait hidden beneath the trees, where the slope

of the ground, steeply descending to the path on the broken brink of the rocky scarp, gave an advantage in a sudden attack. A grim voice told him that no one would know, the path was so slippery with moss and so broken at the verge. They had marked the spot in their upward course in the morning, and said how easily an accident might occur—a false step, a fit of abstraction, then a dash on the rocks below, and thence into the deep green river. There could be no afterwards, as was said of the prisoners in the Bastille.

He had not long to wait beneath the sighing pines; the object of his fierce passion drew nearer, tracked by his snatch of careless song, and suspecting nothing. The light-hearted singing stung the silent listener to keener purpose. The song ceased suddenly, when Paul sprang tiger-like from the bank upon his prey, and with the impetus given by the spring added to the strong pushing of his arms, tried to hurl him into the depths below.

But Edward, though caught unawares, was taller than his cousin and stronger, his bodily powers were better trained, and he grappled at once with his unexpected adversary, whom he had not time to recognise, though his breath was hot upon his face; but his words revealed him—words which Paul forgot as soon as uttered, but Edward never.

The struggle was no light one. The strength of unbridled fury was pitted against the instinct of self-preservation; it seemed as if the terrible embrace could never end but in the death of both cousins. At last in the dreadful whirl Edward succeeded in flinging his cousin from him, in what direction he could not tell, and in the rebound he fell himself backwards, striking his head against the rocky ground and losing consciousness.

Paul went over the brink, grasping with wild instinct at the air, and blindly catching the birchen bough which hung over the river, projecting far from the rocky wall.

The shock of his rapid descent and the immediate peril which he faced, checked the fierce current of his fury and restored him to the self-consciousness which passion of any kind abnegates; and then ensued a moment, the keenest and most terrible that can come to mortal man—the moment in which the veil of passion and prejudice is lifted from the eyes of the soul, and all things stand naked and clear as in the searching gaze of the Judge of all men.

The bough, quivering beneath his weight, bounded and rebounded like some fearful balance between heaven and earth, nay, between heaven and a yawning hungry hell; every bound threw him wildly in the air, loosened the grasp of his clinging hands, and

threatened to hurl him into the depths below: but one more bound and he must go; the fate which he had prepared for another had overtaken himself. He knew by the agony with which his strong young life shrank from its sudden and violent extinction, how dreadful was the crime he had meditated against that other young life kindred to his own.

At supreme moments like these, Eternity asserts itself, the shadow, Time, practically ceases, and the thoughts and experiences of a lifetime crowd into one brief moment by the clock. All Paul Annesley's life rose before him during one rebound of the slight spring which held him suspended above certain death. A flash of wild remorse lighted the deepest recesses of his soul; only to unlive the recent past he would have given all that went before had that been possible. A few minutes before, life had seemed so bitter that death was a coveted boon; but now, in the near view of death's grim face, life had an unspeakable sweetness; his vigorous vitality revolted against dissolution, his soul shuddered at a hereafter vague with retribution, and he, who did not pray before, sent up a wild cry to Heaven for help. Then it was that his agonized gaze caught the face of Gervase Rickman looking down upon him, and he heard his voice entreating him to hold on a little longer.

But no entreaty could stay the slipping of the boughs through his burning hands; help must come at once if he was to be saved. One more vibration of the over-strained spring on which he was poised, sent him upwards, and the downward rebound was so strong that the bough cracked with a shock that jerked his now tremulous hands from their strained clinging; he felt the sliding of the last twigs through his bleeding palms, a wild whirl and the shock of water smiting his body as he met it lengthwise, then the end, darkness, and with it calm.

The silent darkness could not have lasted long, for when life returned to him, he found himself drifting face upwards upon the surface towards the French shore; the current had carried him past the little promontory beneath the spot where he fell; stiff, bruised and dazed though he was, he struck out instinctively, though he could not swim, and kept himself up till he saw some over-hanging sallow branches, grasping at which, he pulled himself out of the rapid current on to a shelving shore, which made a little ledge at the foot of the precipitous cliffs.

He drew himself up under the sallow bushes and sought in his pockets for brandy, which he carried for the benefit of the excursion party. His handkerchief fell out as he did this, and, a thought striking him, he threw it into the stream, which carried

it farther down, where it was afterwards found, together with a guide-book inscribed with his name.

The brandy revived him, and he presently found that he was uninjured, though bruised and strained; falling, as he did, into the centre of the stream, he had escaped rocks. He remembered now that Edward had fallen in the opposite direction to himself, and was no doubt safe, and then he took the decision from which he never afterwards swerved. He had appeared to die before the eyes of Gervase Rickman, he was virtually dead, and it was best so; there was no occasion for him to come to life again.

After resting a while under the bushes, which effectually concealed him from the searchers, he found that the little ledge upon which he landed led up to a broken cleft in the cliff, scarcely large enough to be called a gorge, but sufficiently marked to form a rude ascent, up which he climbed. Having reached the summit, he struck across the mountainous country at right angles to the river. In those remote places, nothing human was to be seen, save one or two peasants at work or guarding flocks, and these he carefully avoided, like the fugitive he was. So he stole cautiously along until the thunderstorm broke and the deluge of rain which descended made his soaked clothes appear natural and the loss of his hat nothing unusual.

The fury of the Alpine storm was as nothing to him after the spiritual cataclysm through which he had passed; he walked on bare-headed beneath the awful splendour of the jagged lightnings and the rushes of rain: now the heavens opened above him and let down sheets of blue and purple flame, discovering vast mountain prospects and the distant plains of France in their lurid glare; now the deafening crack and roar of the thunder, which rolled round him and crashed among the hills till they seemed to rock and split in the agonizing shock, reached his ears; then the flood of rain on the ground blazed like molten metal beneath his feet, and chains and forks of fire flashed before him; then came a crash, which made the solid earth shake beneath him and the mountains shudder above. He scarcely heeded the majesty and terror of the spectacle, but walked on in a dazed despair, with no aim but the vague one of escaping from the past and cutting himself off from the memory of living men. In the apathy of exhaustion which succeeds overstrained feelings he scarcely heeded the tongue of fire which with a hissing sound split a tree a little in advance of him. The tree, green a moment before, was black and charred when he passed beneath it. But afterwards, it seemed little short of a miracle that he had not been struck, as he must have been had he passed it a few minutes earlier. When the

storm abated he reached a little lonely farm, and there took shelter.

As a storm-driven tourist, his appearance excited no surprise, and having had his clothes dried and cleansed to some extent, he procured a straw hat from the farmer and set forward again after supper.

"Que Dieu vous accompagne, Monsieur," said the farmer, in reply to his farewell, and the pious greeting touched his troubled heart.

Does God accompany murderers? he asked himself, as he dragged his weary limbs aimlessly onwards, followed by the demons of remorse and despair.

The farmer had taken him for a Frenchman, his accent was so pure and his idiom so ready; he thought it would be well if others did the same, because as a Frenchman he could more easily conceal himself.

Night was falling by this time, and large lustrous stars were looking pensively from the clear sky. They seemed to his shaken spirit to be accusing him. His way lay across a hilly region, and in his mental preoccupation the farmer's clear directions for the *bourgade* at which he meant to pass the night became confused, and he took the wrong path, keeping westward nevertheless, by the aid of stars and a pocket compass on his watch-chain.

While trudging wearily and doggedly on, as if fleeing from an invisible spirit of justice, he remembered with a sort of rapture that he had not killed his cousin after all, and his heart rose to Heaven in silent unutterable thanksgiving. It was possible to live now that his hands, though not his soul, were clean of the awful stain of murder; in the other case neither life nor death would have been endurable; there would have been no way to fly, as he had realized when poised on that awful balance, "infinite wrath and infinite despair." Doubtless a merciful Power ruled the destinies of men, and to him, Paul Annesley, had shown a mercy beyond the ordinary working of natural laws, had miraculously rescued both soul and body from the pit of hell.

Deep and solemn thoughts moved dove-like upon the troubled waters of his soul and wrought peace and order in those chaotic depths. The stars shone in increasing multitudes above him; it was long past midnight, his limbs dragged more heavily, neither town nor village was within sight. The air was chill, the ground soaked; he could not lie down in the open. Presently he found a rude shed within a wood, a shelter for charcoal-burners or wood-cutters. Beneath the rough roof it was fairly dry and partly

littered with bracken. Here he lay down and slept a dreamless sleep till the crimson morning looked in and touched his eyes.

Then he waked, and wondered at the beauty of the long crimson shafts that shivered upon the tree-trunks, the mystic peace which rested on the unstirred leaves, the fresh radiance of the dew, the glory and the purity of the hour when the new-born day springs forth in its eternal youth. He enjoyed the splendour only for a moment; the sight of the rough boards of his unwonted sleeping-chamber called him back to the bitterness of life.

To wake to a new sorrow is bitter, but to wake to a new sin, worse. *They* were doubtless sleeping, he thought, and when they woke would think of him as one dead, and as such would draw a pitying veil over his frailties. He could now think of Alice as Edward's wife without pain; his wild passion was swept away in the torrent of spiritual anguish. Ever since the day on the lake with Alice, he had felt, though not acknowledged, something more bitter than the fact that she loved Edward—the fact that she must always despise him, that pity must henceforth be the softest feeling he could expect from her; her presence had become agony to him, though he clung to it with a strange persistence. He did not like to think of the mother he was leaving childless, but deep down in his inmost heart the memory of the home she had made so miserable spoke strongly against the chance of going back to live with her, and helped to persuade him, together with his disgust of life, that it was but a just atonement to Edward to seem to die that his cousin might have his inheritance.

The morning air was sharp, and called him unrested from his temporary shelter. He walked on till he reached a cottage, and asked his way to a village, where he found food and rested till afternoon.

He was very stiff and weary, though scarcely conscious of bodily sensations in his inward distress; he walked on, nevertheless, choosing by-ways and unfrequented districts, avoiding railways and high-roads, thinking thus to escape the chance of recognition.

No distinct plan had yet formed itself in his mind; he had only a vague desire to flee away and be at rest, a dim hope that continual bodily movement would quiet his inward fever. He walked on, therefore, in spite of increasing fatigue and pains, till night, rested in a village inn, and rose unrefreshed next morning to continue his way.

It was Sunday morning; the September sun was shining warmly on the ripening grapes in the vineyards on the sunny slopes of that hilly region in the Vosges; the sedate tinkle of church

bells was heard in the stillness; now a troop of pretty maidens and prematurely aged matrons were going to some village church; now a pleasure-party, in an odd clumsy vehicle, half cart, half carriage, was jogging along the dusty causeway to a neighbouring farm or hamlet; every creature, human or otherwise, seemed gay and innocent, only he was out of tune, an anomaly in a bright world.

He reached a pretty hamlet among the vineyards in a fold of the hills; it was now very hot, a heavy languor was creeping over him, and, seeing the church door open as if to invite him, he went in. The music was not beautiful, but it soothed him, together with the shade and coolness; he scarcely noticed that the choir sang through their noses, nor did the rest of the congregation.

Religion was a subject to which Paul Annesley had given little attention. He did not like the very pronounced specimen his mother affected; it appeared to act as a stimulant upon all the least agreeable elements in her character; it had struck him very early in life that she was always most religious when most vile-tempered, that she contemplated with evident enjoyment the future reprobation of all those who differed from her. His French school was conducted by a Protestant, and French Protestantism is not a seductive religion, especially to the young. Paul often thought that there might after all have been some excuse for St. Bartholomew's Eve, if the Huguenots of those days resembled the Calvinists of his.

But his religious instincts were all awake and quivering with painful vitality to-day, and when the priest began his simple sermon, he was listening with hungry eagerness for some clue to the maze of misery in which his life was involved. Though he scarcely heard what the old priest said in his pure and simple French to his "children," something in his way of saying it and something in his face convinced him that here was one who had found a clue to the mystery of life. A simple kindly life such as this priest's would be a sweet and restful thing, he thought.

But when the office was ended, and he found himself again in the open air, sitting on the low wall of a vineyard a stone's throw from the church, idly watching the bright-eyed lizards darting over the stones in the sun, something the gentle old priest had said seemed to illuminate his past life. "Lose thyself and find Me," a sentence from an old book Paul had never read, an echo from a still older book he had read, quoted by the preacher, kept repeating itself in his brain.

The pendulum of his mind, thus strongly touched, swung to the other extreme, and with all the intensity of his nature he yearned

to sacrifice himself as unreservedly as he had once striven to please himself.

While he was thus musing, the *curé* approached him, a tall, bent, white-haired figure in black cassock and broad hat, and stopped on his leisurely way to the presbytery, not unwilling to have a little chat with a stranger, a pleasure seldom enjoyed in that remote hamlet. He had seen the troubled, passion-worn face among the well-known faces of his little flock, and something in the strained wide gaze had touched him. Here, he thought, was a man acquainted with sorrow, that strange birthright of humanity.

Paul, replying to his salutation, raised his eyes from the lizards and looked into a venerable and kindly face, lined with years and care, but peaceful and sweet, and felt a growing confidence in him.

Monsieur was tired, the priest surmised, after a few words had been exchanged; the day was hot; would he come into the presbytery and rest awhile in the cool?

Monsieur was glad to do so, and soon found himself strolling slowly by the side of his new acquaintance through the narrow lane between the vineyards towards the presbytery, a white house with green venetian shutters, and shaded in front by a great walnut-tree.

CHAPTER II.

BURIED ALIVE.

THE interior of the presbytery was very cool and clean and bare Paul was glad to sink into a wooden elbow-chair by the window on the sill of which was coiled the one spoiled and pampered Sybarite of the establishment, a great white Angora cat, equally idolized by the *curé* and his housekeeper, Mlle. Françoise, who was clattering about the bare brick floor laying the cloth for dinner.

She was extremely glad to see Monsieur, she said in her high shrill voice, it was pleasant for M. le Curé to see a new face sometimes. It was a most fortunate thing that he was not dining at the château to-day, and still more fortunate that she had killed a fowl; that was doubtless the inspiration of some saint.

Monsieur Paul was duly grateful for her hospitable intentions and acknowledged the skilful cooking of the omelette added to the festal Sunday dinner expressly for him; yet he so troubled his host by the injustice he did to the good fare set before him, that he was obliged to apologize for his want of appetite, saying that he was unwell. Nevertheless, good manners, with the aid of a potent home-made cordial which Father André administered to him, enabled him to rouse himself to an interesting conversation in the course of which Paul discovered that, besides speaking a purer French than most rustic clergy, his host had evidently seen something of the world, and was both well-read and well-bred. His bright dark eyes looked into the world with a pensive cheerfulness, his features were finely cut, and the long white hair flowing beneath his skull-cap finished a pleasing and venerable aspect.

Paul's black beard, at that time an unusual ornament on an English face, his crisp curly hair, his dark-blue eyes and his fluent Parisian French were all compatible with his host's supposition that he was a Frenchman; though his conversation occasionally suggested points of view distinctly foreign. The fact of his being on a walking tour further pointed to a foreign extraction or education.

After dinner, they adjourned to the garden, where Françoise

had placed wine and fruit on a table beneath the great walnut-tree, and whence they could see the hamlet dotted about the hill-slope amid vineyards and orchards. "They are so good," Father André said, meaning his parishioners, "poor children, their troubles are great. Next week we have a wedding; a good brave girl in that cottage yonder by the plane-tree, who supported her widowed mother for years, is to marry a nice lad from a farm a few miles above in the mountains. I shall miss the dear child; yes, I shall miss her."

"You will still have a large family," Paul commented, a little moved by this, to him, novel way of disposing of domestic feelings.

"Yes, yes, but I shall regret Madeleine," he replied, and then he rose and apologized for leaving his guest while he went to see one of the "children," who was sick.

He did not return until after vespers, when he found Paul, who had been dozing heavily since his departure, very ill, too ill to move. He was helped to bed, where he remained for weeks; carefully nursed by the priest and his housekeeper, both of whom would have thought it criminal to send him elsewhere or to trust him to other hands, while they could tend him.

Next morning, after a night of fierce pain, Paul, finding that he had rheumatic fever, desired Françoise to give him his clothes, from the pockets of which he took such papers and letters as gave any clue to his identity, and, tearing them with difficulty, bid the housekeeper burn them on the hearth before his eyes. Having seen this done, he became delirious.

"The good God has indeed sent us a guest, Françoise," said her master, on entering the room shortly after and looking upon this spectacle, "poor fellow! He is no doubt a good Catholic, though a foreigner; I was struck by his devout air yesterday. And he is in trouble."

"But his hands, Monsieur le Curé," returned Françoise, pointing them out. "And what terrible language is he speaking?"

It was the bloody mark of his torn hand on the white home-spun coverlet which had set the patient raving a few minutes before, and now he was pointing at it, and crying out about Cain and his ineffaceable brand in a way which would have chilled his listeners' blood had they not been ignorant of English.

"He hurt his hands in climbing; he wore gloves over some kind of dressing yesterday," replied the *curé*, bidding Françoise remove the stained sheet and bind up the hands. Then he did what Paul had foreseen, turned out his pockets in search of his name and address that he might communicate with his friends, and

found nothing but a pocket-book full of gold and notes, a well-filled purse and some jewels of price, which he put aside in a safe place.

In his lucid intervals Paul knew how severe his illness was, yet he did not think he should die, much as he now wished for death. For since he had twice been miraculously preserved, there was no doubt some purpose to be fulfilled in his life. Perhaps only the purpose of expiation. God's mark was upon him as upon Cain, so that none could slay him; he was doomed to live.

But as he grew better, he began to form schemes for turning the life of which he was so weary to some useful purpose, and when the doctor told him one morning that all danger was past and time and good nursing alone could now help him, he, knowing well what illness like his leaves in its track, faced the probability of becoming a cripple, a condition which, throwing him eventually upon charity for support, might lead to the discovery he feared.

As soon as he could hold a pen he wrote to Captain McIlvray, one of those Highland officers whose expensive amusements had so nearly ruined him in the days of his poverty, and pledging him to secrecy, explained that civilized life had become insupportable to him, and that, wishing to break completely from all past connections, he had taken advantage of an accident to disappear. McIlvray had lost money to him on the eve of his Swiss journey, and not having means of payment at hand, had given him his acceptance at a few months' date. Paul therefore desired him to forward this sum, with a hundred pounds more; and, as McIlvray's bill would be found among his effects and presented for payment, he gave him papers for the whole amount dated before his supposed death, so that McIlvray could claim payment of the balance due to him from the executors.

Captain McIlvray, being just then under orders to go to India, had little time to spend on other people's affairs, and he did not feel called upon to prevent Paul Annesley's virtual suicide. The money therefore safely reached the hands of Father André, together with a letter to Paul, in which McIlvray ventured upon a brief remonstrance with him. Thus, with Mrs. Annesley's diamonds and a valuable ring intended for Alice, Paul was in possession of over a thousand pounds, sufficient to keep him from want.

He spent many weeks of acute pain and heavy sickness in the little clean bare guest-chamber of the presbytery, seeing nothing but the sky through the white-curtained window, the crucifix in black and ivory on the white wall, the wood-fire crackling on the hearth, and four figures which changed and melted into one

another like figures in a dream; the doctor feeling his pulse and talking in a low voice, but not to him; Françoise in her white cap and sabots, and a kind of phantom Françoise with a different nose and stouter figure, who proved to be Pauline, her married sister; and the *curé*, clad in a rusty black cassock, with his grey locks beneath his skull-cap.

The latter knelt by his bedside by the hour, praying aloud in a low monotonous voice, very soothing to the patient, who looked at him with the long wondering gaze with which an infant's eyes follow its mother's movements. The women also varied their ministrations, especially at night, by telling their beads aloud; but their prayers sounded more business-like than the Father's, and it became a sort of occupation to the patient to speculate upon the slipping of the beads through their fingers in a given time.

When he was able at last to sit up, propped with cushions at the open window, it was warm still October weather, and the country was full of the cheery sounds of the vintage. He could see the vintagers at work on the sunny slopes, men, women and children all busy and happy, singing and laughing from morning till night. The *curé*, with his cassock tucked up, was busy in his own little vineyard; Françoise, with the ubiquity and ceaseless industry of which only French women are capable, was out gathering and carrying great baskets of ripe grapes, the choicest clusters of which found their way to the sick room. Paul, in his languor, thought he would like to live this peaceful life for ever.

Yet Father André found time to read to his patient and talk to him, and by some mysterious process, aided by one or two broken hints from the evidently suffering man, discovered much of what was passing in his mind. Paul, sundered by the strange mental experiences of sickness, in which weeks have the effect of years, from his past life and all its affections, and feeling born again into a different world, clung to his gentle host with the dependent reverent affection of a child; the priest on his part loved the younger man, as only those cut off from natural ties can love strangers, and the two looked at each other often in silent moments, wondering at the bond which was being formed between them and at the experiences which had brought each to that remote village presbytery so far from the original sphere of either. Thus the *curé's* conversation, which was more interesting and less tiring to his patient than reading, gradually became of a more personal nature and full of anecdotes.

"It seems, Monsieur, that you were not bred a priest?" Paul said one day, after one of these narrations.

"It is true," he replied, looking quickly up and then down

again; "would you like to know why I left the world, or would it be tiresome to listen?"

Paul replied that it would interest him above all things.

"Because," observed M. André, taking a pinch of stuff and seating himself on a stone near the patient's chair, which was placed in a sunny sheltered nook in the garden, "I have sometimes permitted myself the liberty of thinking that a sorrow like mine may have befallen you. Pardon me if I am mistaken."

His name, he continued, was Armand de Fontigny, a name of historic fame, as Paul knew. His education was not austere; though a Catholic, he looked upon religion merely as a thing it was among the family traditions to respect. His youth was as gay as rank, wealth, good looks and good health could make it, in the gayest city of the world; but, though devoted to pleasure, he was not vicious; he only wished to be thought so.

He became assiduous in his attentions to the wife of a friend. He did not love her, he did not think that she loved him, but the vanity of each was gratified by the idea of a conquest over the other.

The husband was unsuspicious, until one day when some report reached his ears. That night De Fontigny met the lady at a masked ball. It was carnival time; the now suspicious husband was there also, and followed them about masked, until he had no doubt of their identity. Then he shot the lady dead.

This shot, as he learnt during the official enquiry upon the death, was intended for her supposed lover.

She fell at De Fontigny's feet, his face and clothing were splashed with her blood. A second shot followed—the man had turned his weapon upon himself. De Fontigny stood among the masqueraders in the brilliance of the ball-room, his ears ringing with the gay dance music and the sound of the two shots, motionless with horror, while the dancing broke up in wild tumult and the blood of his two victims stained the parquet.

Father André paused, trembled, and with an apology left his guest. He did not conclude his narrative till next day, when he spoke of his misery and remorse, his disgust with follies which had resulted in such tragedy, his flight to the cloister, and its calm round of prayer and toil, which, though it at first soothed him, did not suffice him. He longed for activity and usefulness, and after having been sent out on one or two occasions to take the place of some sick parish priest, was appointed to this little parish of Rémy, where, as Paul saw, his life was a course of labour, prayer and service to his parishioners, of whom he was truly the father.

"And have you found happiness?" his listener asked, at the close of the narrative.

"Not happiness, my dear son; that is not of this world, but healing and peace."

Paul looked up with moist eyes at the lined and pensive face before him, and his decision was taken.

He told his kind friend his whole history from beginning to end, and added his determination to enter the religious life.

Father André listened with sympathy, and advised him to pause and consider well before he entered a life for which he might have no vocation. He reminded him that as yet he was not even a Catholic.

But Paul's resolution was taken with the fiery intensity of his nature. The constant sight of the crucifix during his days and nights of agony had consoled and strengthened him, as that august sight always does; it had further wrought with the morbid tendency inseparable from combined physical and mental misery, to produce in him the strange religion which Carlyle professed, but like the windbag he was, did not practise, and named the Worship of Sorrow.

Like Father André, Paul felt that joy was impossible to one whose past was so criminal, nothing was left for him but pain; he now rushed into the extreme of self-mortification. He remained some months at the presbytery, until he was quite recovered, sharing as far as a layman could, the occupations of his host, liking the peaceful life, for which he felt himself unworthy, and instructed and curbed by his spiritual father, who at last resigned him to the community with whom his noviciate was to be passed, not without regret and deep heart-searchings.

The fire which had burnt so fiercely on the altar of human love, now blazed with stronger fervour at a loftier shrine, and for a year or two Brother Sebastian passed through a strange and exciting phase of spiritual experience; his austerities produced their natural result;—visions and ecstasies—all the strange tumult of over-wrought religious feeling, brightened and ennobled by the golden thread of pure and undefiled religion which ran through it all, and which runs through so many strange and mysterious human vagaries. So entirely had he broken with his former life, that it seemed sometimes to the fervid Friar Sebastian as if Paul Annesley were the phantom of some half-forgotten dream, and the people he had known and loved, fancies as insubstantial. Even the mother he had so truly loved, in spite of the misery she had made in his home, faded away. A Madonna in the convent-chapel with a look of Alice attracted him strongly,

and sometimes set him dreaming of those far-off phantoms, and then he saw Alice married happily to Edward and forgetful of the trouble he had cast upon her youth, and his heart ached for the mother who mourned him as dead. But not for long; such thoughts were driven away, if not by gentler means, by knotted cords.

Brother Sebastian had only once travelled far from the Dominican Convent in which he had taken refuge from the storm of life, before he was sent to serve the church in which Edward Annesley saw him during the temporary disability of the *curé*, and on that first occasion the brief encounter by the Lake of Geneva occurred.

Edward looked upon that first meeting as the illusion of a mind overstrained by the perpetual thought of a man whose death he had caused. That brief vision was made more ghost-like and unreal by the fact that Sebastian had put off his friar's black cloak and hood, and was wearing only the white tunic and scapular when he passed Edward; when he saw him, by immediately putting on the black mantle and hood, he became inconspicuous, and thus vanished more effectually than he could have done, had his dress remained white.

Not until Edward Annesley saw the living Paul standing at the altar before him with that wide gaze of mingled pain and dismay, did he realize what his supposed death had cost him. For reason with himself as he would, the thought that Paul had actually met his death at his hands was an abiding grief. Though he did not grow morbid over this acute memory, it made him very sensitive, and lent the keenest sting to those calumnies which made him practically a social outcast. There were moments of dejection in which he did indeed attribute to himself part of the guilt which had apparently resulted in the death of the would-be slayer; brief moments reasoned away painfully enough by the reflection that when he flung Paul from him, he did not know in which direction either of them would fall; that he was not sure whether Paul had flung him or he had hurled Paul, since when he recovered consciousness, he could remember nothing but Paul's sudden attack and furious words, followed by a wild whirl, in which he had tried to wrest himself from the hands which were pushing him over the brink, and had at last fallen senseless. Gervase Rickman alone knew all. He had seen the attack from a higher and distant point in the path, where the bend of the river bank projected beyond the trees which obscured the spot lower down, and had arrived in time to see both cousins fall.

If Edward's lips had not been sealed by loyalty to the supposed dead man, it would have been a heaven of relief to him to have published the story on the house-tops, and thus disburden himself of a secret it was pain and grief to keep.

All this heavy burden fell from his heart on that Sunday afternoon at the sight of the lost Paul, holding the Sacrament and blessing the kneeling people; such a deep divine relief came to him after the first shock had passed that he could scarcely think what to do next. His sisters, who had not known their cousin so intimately, and who were but children at the time of his loss, did not recognize him: only in coming out one said to the other, "Of whom did the priest remind you? He is very like somebody."

Then their brother joined them and walked only part of the way back, telling them that he had seen a friend whom he wished to overtake and should perhaps be away for an hour or two.

When he returned to the church, he found that the priest had already left it, having disrobed with amazing rapidity. The sacristan seemed to be a surprisingly stupid rustic; he could not understand Edward's good fluent French, learnt in the school at which Paul had been with him, and his own *patois* was so strong that it was difficult for Edward to understand him. At length, however, it came out that the strange priest was stopping at the presbytery, which was situated in a spot to reach which such complicated directions were necessary, that Edward bid the sacristan conduct him thither personally. But this could not be done at any price, not even for a gold ten-franc piece, the sacristan's duties at the church were so urgent. At last some one was found to act as guide, and the presbytery was eventually reached. The convalescent *curé* received the stranger with great urbanity, and talked so much that it was difficult to get a word in edgeways, and still more difficult to convey any ideas to the *curé's* understanding after the words had reached his ears. Finally Edward heard that Brother Sebastian (the name slipped out at an unguarded moment) had finished his duties at Vauvières and was gone, no one knew whither. The truth that Paul was trying to conceal himself was now obvious.

Edward returned to the inn, told his mother privately what had occurred, and of his intention of finding the fugitive friar if possible, and set forth on his chase, accompanied by his servant, who spoke French.

By the aid of this man he found out that the brother had left the village on foot immediately after Benediction.

It would be tedious to follow in detail the chase which ensued,

Neither railway nor main high-road approached that secluded district, and a few enquiries showed that the friar had not gone by the river. It was therefore best to follow him on foot through byways and woods, which Edward did when the direction in which Paul left Vauvières had been ascertained. Annesley's professional training here stood him in good stead; with a fair map and a thorough mastery of topographical details, together with the aid of his man Williams, whom he sent on a parallel route to his own, and bid enquire diligently along the road, he traced the friar to a convent in the town of Volny. He then applied to the superior of the community for information, which was politely refused in such a manner as to leave no doubt on his mind that Paul was in the house. This he watched with such assiduity that both he and his man incurred the suspicions of the authorities, and were obliged to desist after a few days.

Nevertheless they still hung about the town, frequenting churches and making enquiries about preaching friars to no effect. Though Volny is a large town, it is as well to save trouble to the learned reader by recommending him not to look on the map for it, or for Vauvières or Bourget, because perhaps he will not find them.

Edward was beginning to think the chase hopeless, since the only marks of identity in the fugitive were the name and the scar; for the garb was a concealment rather than an aid. One evening he strolled out of the town when the dusk was falling, racking his brains for devices to reach one who had cut himself off from every possible means of communication with the outer world, and rejecting every scheme that presented itself in turn, when he came to a dray laden with wine-casks and partially overturned in the road. One of the draymen had been hurt by a cask rolling upon him, the other was tearing his hair and reproaching all the saints in heaven for not coming to his aid. A few peasants, attracted by his cries, were extricating the horses and righting the dray. Edward took off his coat and helped them.

While he was thus occupied he did not see what was happening to the injured man, who had been laid aside upon some sacks. But when he had done all he could, and was standing in his shirt-sleeves wiping his face and looking in the now moonlit dusk at the righted dray, he saw a figure bending over the injured man, and bandaging his head. It was that of a Dominican friar.

His heart gave a strong throb, he stepped into the shadow of the way-side trees and watched the friar's ministrations in silence.

Presently a light *carriole* came up, the patient was lifted into

it and driven slowly away, the friar gave his benediction to the departing procession of dray, *carriole*, and friendly peasants, and turning, went swiftly on his way in the opposite direction, without observing that motionless figure in the shadow.

In a few minutes Edward's quick footsteps were close upon him and reached his ear; but he did not turn. Edward was side by side with him when he spoke.

"Paul," he said—"Paul Annesley."

Then the friar turned with a suppressed cry. He recognised Edward's face in the white moonlight, and looked swiftly in every direction for some way of escape, but, seeing none, stood still, with folded hands, head bent and downcast eyes.

"At last!" cried Edward, laying a vigorous hand on each of his shoulders. "What a chase you have given me! Paul, you did a wrong thing and a cruel thing. All these years we thought you dead. One word from you would have made all the difference."

The gaunt frame quivered beneath Edward's strong touch; the haggard face, which seemed terribly altered in that cold white light, became agitated—the calm mask worn for years was suddenly rent away from the reality beneath; and the gazer's heart was pierced to the core by this changed aspect, through which his old familiar friend was still so visible.

He could not realize that Brother Sebastian was the living reality and Paul Annesley the faded dream. The monkish garb seemed to him but a piece of masquerade which must be put off, and with it, perhaps, the lines of suffering in the wan face.

The friar's deep blue eyes gazed spell-bound and full of unspeakable feelings into the familiar and once so hated face, on which, as well as on his own, the record of troubled years was now written, but he could utter no word, though his lips moved slightly; he could scarcely think—the sight of Edward's honest face, graver and manlier, if so much sadder than in his young days, stirred him so deeply.

"I thought you dead all this time," Edward continued. "You don't know what it is to think your best friend died by your own hand."

The cloistered life faded like a dream from Sebastian's mind, those phantom figures from the past, which he had so long banished, grew real and lived again at the sound of these wholesome words; his unnatural restraint gave way at last, natural human tears sprang to his eyes, but he could not speak—his cousin's reproach was so keen and yet so different to what he had expected.

CHAPTER III.

THE WEDDING-DRESS.

THE time was drawing near to Alice Lingard's wedding-day; every little detail of her future life was arranged; Rickman's letters, in spite of the busy life he was leading, and the important political events in which he was concerned, were growing more frequent, more tender, and more difficult to answer.

One autumn evening a box arrived at the Manor. Alice's heart sank when she saw it, for it contained her wedding-dress.

Sibyl was slightly pained to see how little Alice seemed interested in the dress; she had some difficulty in persuading her to try it on, but at last succeeded after much coaxing on her part, and much persuasion from the dressmaker busy at work in the house.

"If only Gervase were here!" exclaimed Sibyl, when the weighty business was achieved and Alice stood before a cheval-glass, tall and statue-like in the long satin folds, her hair crowned by the white wreath, and the veil floating mist-like about her in the pale twilight. "Wait, and I will fetch papa. Don't stir one inch for your life."

"You are cold, miss," said the dressmaker, for Alice was shivering; "we must hope for a sunny morning for the wedding. To be sure, it is chilly to-night."

"Very chilly," replied Alice, listening to the fitful moan of the wind and the patter of rain on the glass. "How pleased Sibyl is!" she was thinking. For Sibyl had not been pleased, but rather shocked, when the engagement first took place, and only the spectacle of her brother's happiness had reconciled her to it by degrees.

It took some minutes to find Mr. Rickman, minutes during which Alice stood motionless before the spectral reflection of her tall white self, forbearing to move, partly because of the pins, which marked some alterations, partly in obedience to Sibyl.

When Mr. Rickman finally arrived, the dusk had grown so deep that he asked for candles, the delay in lighting which kept Alice still longer in her constrained position, so that at last, when

she was properly illuminated, and the old gentleman was scrutinizing her through his glasses, with murmurs of profound satisfaction, she suddenly fell fainting full-length on the carpet, rumpling the satin folds, and crushing wreath and veil indiscriminately together.

"Standing long in one position often produces that effect," Mr. Rickman observed afterwards; "to move but one limb relaxes the tension of every muscle."

"It's the most dreadful luck," whispered the dressmaker to the maids, who had assembled to look on, "and the veil all crushed, and the dress spotted with the water they threw over her face!"

The next day Sibyl and her father drove into Medington to make some of the innumerable purchases connected with the wedding, but Alice excused herself from accompanying them.

"It is odd," Sibyl said, when starting, "that so much merchandise seems necessary to unite two loving hearts. When I marry I shall run away; then there can be no fuss, and money will be saved."

"Zure enough," Raysh Squire said, when he saw her drive through the village, smiling all over her bright face, "anybody med think she was a gwine to be married, instead of t'other. I never zeen such a maid!"

Alice set off for a walk when the carriage had started; she passed through the fields above the churchyard, and saw Raysh at work, putting the final touch to three little fresh-turfed graves.

"Prettier made graves than they you never zeen, Miss Alice," he observed with pride. "A power o' thought goes into the digging o' they little uns, and shepherd he would hae 'em all put in separate, say what you would. I hreckon he made no count o' the laäbour he giv me."

The little graves went to Alice's heart; she knew what a bitter blank they made in her friend's home, populous as that little home still was, and she went on her way, wondering at the mystery and sadness of life, and the silent heroism that bears so many burdens.

Hubert bounded on before or trotted at her side, unvexed by mysteries, and keenly conscious of the pleasure of a ramble over the downs. Some children were picking blackberries along the field-hedges, their faces happy and stained with purple juice; they too were unvexed by moral problems.

It was a chill gusty autumn day, with wan sun-gleams and flying scuds; storm-driven gulls flashed their bright plumage against the black curtain of rain-cloud; belated swallows skimmed

the ground, fluttering against the wind; Nature was not in one of her sweetest moods, yet she was fascinating rather than sad.

"If only one had not to live," thought Alice, "if one might mingle with Nature and be still."

After some apparently aimless wandering, she caught sight of what she was seeking, the figure of Daniel Pink, moving heavily against the wind, which shook his beard and lifted the cape of the old military great-coat he wore over his smock-frock. He was driving some sheep into a wattled fold, and she waited till he had finished and finally secured his flock by binding a hurdle to its staple. Then he went under the lee of a hedge, and, taking off his coat, set to work to point some ash-spars with his bill-hook. Alice then approached him with her usual friendly greeting, and the lines on his rugged face softened. He folded his coat and placed it on the bank as a seat for her.

"'Tis fine and loo here," he said, "and you med set down and hrest."

So Alice sat down and watched the white chips fly, with Hubert crouched at her feet, while Rough, the shepherd's dog, now partly superannuated and assisted by a young and inexperienced dog, whose vagaries were a source of much trouble to him, looked at the deer-hound with a mistrustful glance.

"Raysh has just finished turfing the little graves, shepherd," she said; "they look very peaceful."

He made no reply, but looked away towards the churchyard, which he could not see, and went on chopping.

"You said once," continued Alice, "that you gave up fretting for them all at once—that you could bear anything now."

"Ay," he replied, stopping in his work to look enquiringly at her.

"There is so much trouble in the world," Alice continued, "sometimes it seems so difficult to bear." The tears sprang to her eyes, and her words died away in a sigh.

The shepherd sat down silently on a pile of ash poles, and thought for a few seconds.

"Ay," he replied at last. "When they dree was took, I couldn't zim to bear it nohow. The pretty ways of 'em, and the little maid that knowing! The biggest wasn't only dree year old. They knowd avore I'd a turned the carner in the lane, they two, and they'd hrun to meet me when I come home. 'Vather, vather!' they'd cry out, and dance that pretty; and the littlest, he'd get his mother or his sister to hold en up. Vust time I come home and they dree lying still and cold indoors, I pretty nigh went dead. After that I couldn't abide to come home no

more till all was abed. One night, lambing-time, a month after I'd a buried them, I was out alone atop of the down. Then I took on thinking, thinking of they dree and their pretty ways I could never see no more, and how they was took off avore we could look hround and all, and I took on that dreadful I zimmed to be tore asunder inside, and I couldn't zim to hold up noways. I thought how I was never one for drink, and always done my best. There was others done wrong, and their children was spared; there, it did zim that hard! Then, when I was like to rive asunder with that went on inside of me, I zes to meself, 'Stand up, Dan'l Pink, and be a man! You've a had many mercies, and what be you to cry out agen One above when trouble is zent?' Then I zaid over the Belief, and it zimmed comforting, and I got up and done zommat for the ship."

Daniel Pink did not say all this straight off, but with many breaks and pauses, and much apparent casting about for words, symbols which are hard to come at when one is not accustomed to handle them and turn them over and about at will; sometimes he stopped in the middle of a sentence with a catch in his breath, sometimes he looked at Alice for sympathy, sometimes away over the windy landscape. But at this point his manner altered; he turned his face from Alice and seemed to forget her presence and his own identity and spoke in a deeper key, more fluently and with less country accent.

"I sat on the steps o' the hut there," he said, pointing to a wheeled and movable house; "I was afeard to goo in and lay down and leave the yowes, and I fell athinking o' they dree again, and the littlest that pretty! Then it came over me agen as though I should rive asunder, and I shet my teeth and bended my head down and groaned, and held my arms tight over my chest to keep it from bursting. 'Twas the full o' the moon, and the grass white with hrime. I seen all as plain as daylight, the ship feeding, and the new-dropped lambs moving about, and the stars above, when I looked up. Then out of the shade cast by the hill I seen a *man* coming tow'rds me."

The shepherd paused; his face changed, a solemn rapt expression came over it—he was evidently forgetful of all around him. Alice held her breath and left watching his face as she had been doing, covering her own with her hand and bending a little forwards, her arm stayed upon her knee. "A man," he continued, "tall, vurry tall and fine-made, and dressed like St. John in Arden church window, with long curled hair and light shining round his head. I came over that still and hushed, like when the wind falls at zunzet, and the sea's like glass and the barley

stands without a shake. I couldn't so much as stand up, I was that holden. I looked and looked, as though I could never leave off looking. The ship took no notice, and *he* passed through them, slow and solemn, with never a sound. I seen the red marks on the hands and feet; but when he was quite nigh, I could only look at the faäce. 'Twas the look in the eyes that went through me. I caint say what that look was like, it made me that happy and quiet. The figure passed that close, the blue dress, the colour of the sky, nigh touched me. I couldn't turn when he passed beyond; I was holden. But 'twas no drame—the ship was moving about and feeding and the lambs bleating as plain as day. When I could turn, there was the moon shining bright as day, and the frost on the grass and the stars above, and nothing more. Then I zimmed that happy and light and peaceful—I knowed there was nothing I couldn't bear after that!"

The shepherd ceased speaking, but continued his rapt gaze straight ahead, thinking thoughts that Alice dared not interrupt by words.

At last he rose, took up his bill-hook and went on pointing his spars.

"And nothing seems hard to bear now, shepherd?" she asked presently.

"No, miss, nothing zims hard now. I med hae a power o' trouble yet, plase God I lives long enough, but I 'lows I shaint never fret no more," he replied.

The wind had sobbed itself to rest, now, and the sunset was blazing through great bars of rending cloud in marvellous splendour. Alice's feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as she sped homewards, deeply touched and lifted up in heart, thinking thoughts that no words could express.

Daniel Pink could not even read, he had scarcely half a language with which to clothe his simple thoughts; the mighty Past was to him a blank, the garnered treasure of the thoughts of ages and the beautiful songs of great poets, the glory of Art, and the refinements and adornments of human life, were all denied to him. Yet Alice's heart bowed in reverence before him, he had that which great prophets and mighty kings had desired in vain. Could she not emulate his simple resignation? she wondered. She had now reached the churchyard, and leant on the low wall to look at the three little graves.

Daily she had prayed to be a loving wife to Gervase Rickman, and daily the thought of the marriage, now the most obvious of duties, had grown more terrible, until the simple incident of trying on the wedding-dress had overpowered her. If she could

but tear Edward out of her heart and her heart with him, she would willingly have done it. But since the unfortunate day in the summer, when the news of her engagement burst upon him, her peace had vanished; she could not forget his face, his silence, and his one swift glance into her eyes. Yet here on this very spot he had offered himself to Sibyl.

It was too late to hesitate—she was as much bound as if actually married; and her heart was incapable of treachery, especially to Gervase, and to the old man who hung upon her with such trustful dependence. To marry this man, whom she liked but could not love, was plainly her duty, to swerve from it was cowardice; marriage was in her eyes a sacrament, love would doubtless be given with it. Peace had come to Daniel Pink, would it be denied her in due time? She would wait patiently and shrink from no duty, however hard.

Alice little thought that at that very hour, a friar, in the narrow solitude of his cell, was driving her from his mind with literal scourging of the flesh, as if an image so wholesome and so suggestive of good, could in any wise harm. Truly peace and self-conquest come in various guise, yet only by one way, the way of Faith and Duty.

No vision shone upon Alice, nor did she use bodily pain to conquer what seemed invincible; but at last she walked home through the darkening fields with perfect peace in her heart, confident that however her soul might now shrink, she would have strength to be true at the difficult moment and to the end. When she saw Sibyl's sweet face on reaching home, she returned her smile frankly without inward self-reproach, listened with due interest to the account she gave of the afternoon's business, and commended her purchases with sufficient animation. Yet she was glad that Sibyl left her for a few hours' study; and when she was gone, she sank into an arm-chair by the drawing-room fire thankful to enjoy the luxury of solitude.

Mr. Rickman was busy in his study; the servants were in another part of the house, which was very still, so still that the hall-clock's ticking was audible and every little movement in the rose-tree trained by the window asserted itself. Through all this stillness, she presently heard a carriage drive up and the door-bell ring, and started into a listening attitude. "Gervase!" she murmured, remembering that he had said he might run down any day for a night or two.

It was not Gervase; for he did not open the door and walk in, but waited while a servant came from some remote attic, whence Alice heard her descend in the silence and pass from corridor to

corridor, her footsteps echoing in Alice's strained ears, and finally open the door just as the visitor had raised his hand to ring again.

Why should Alice's heart beat so fast? She could not hear more than a faint murmur of a man's voice when the door opened; she did not know what she expected. But when the maid tripped in and said, "Captain Annesley wishes to see Miss Lingard," she thought that she had known who was there from the first, and, with a presentiment that some crisis was approaching, bade the maid show him up.

She heard his step on every stair, and was glad of the growing dusk to hide her face; the day when he first came six years ago and saw her in that very room in the spring sunshine returned to her mind with all its overwhelming associations. She could not remain still, but rose from her seat; it seemed as if she would have herself in better control standing than sitting.

So he came in and found her standing on the rug with the fire-light upon her, and something in her face not easy to describe, though she received him calmly, saying that she was surprised to see him, having supposed him to be on the Continent.

"I wished to see you alone," he said, with an air that impressed her and inspired her with dim foreboding. "I have something to tell you that will surprise you."

"No bad news, I hope?" she asked, faintly.

"You once asked me to tell you all that I knew of my cousin's disappearance," he continued. "I could not do so then. I can now. I believed that you loved him, Alice, and that is how I interpreted your reason for refusing me. What happened on that afternoon, you said, made it impossible for you ever to marry."

"But I am going to be married," she urged in a faint voice.

"You are *engaged* to be married," he corrected, "and perhaps you do not care to know what happened on that afternoon. But you must know. It is Paul's wish. He is still living. He sends you a message, and a letter."

"Paul? Paul? not dead? Oh, no!" she cried, passing her hand before her eyes as if to clear away the mist rising before them. "What does this mean?"

"He is not dead. I have found him," continued Edward; "he has told me all—*all* that passed between you."

Alice trembled and looked at him appealingly. Why did he come thus to trouble her peace, and why did he speak in that hard voice? It seemed as if he was there to judge her.

"Stay," she replied, "I know more than you think. I heard you talking. I was under the trees when you passed. You made

Gervase promise not to tell what had occurred, especially not to tell me."

"Do you know why I wished you not to know?" he asked, almost fiercely. "I wished to spare you. I thought you loved that poor fellow. *I was told so.*"

"What I felt then is now of no consequence," returned Alice coldly. "But since I asked you to tell me what you knew of that unfortunate affair, I must certainly listen."

"Thank you. In the meantime I will deliver Paul's letter to you. Perhaps when you have read it you will think that my story is unnecessary."

Alice took the letter with a shaking hand, and though it was now too dark to read it, she made out the superscription in the once familiar hand by the firelight, and trembled very violently. "It is terrible," she faltered, "to read a letter from one you have so long thought dead."

"It will be better to read it, nevertheless," he replied remorselessly. Then, seeing a taper on the writing-table, he lighted it, placed it near the trembling, agitated woman, and withdrew to the other side of the room, looking out of the window into the gathering night,—the window in which he had first seen her.

Alice was a long time reading that letter, though it was not very lengthy, and was written and worded clearly enough. The garden and the down beyond it sank into deeper and deeper shadow while she read; the trees lapsed into solid black masses; a stray, wan star, peeped here and there through rents in the flying clouds, and then a watery moon rose, and transfused the black shapes with changing glory.

The silence deepened, the hall clock ticked steadily through it. Edward continued motionless at the window, Alice motionless in her chair at the table, some coals fell together in the grate, a bright flame leapt up and cast its fitful radiance over the room, and over the two silent figures; Sibyl's cat stirred comfortably in her slumber by the fire, and gave herself a cosy hug. Alice wished almost that she had never been born.

At last she spoke, and there was some leaven of contrition, some air of a convicted offender in her manner.

"Captain Annesley," she said, in a clear and even voice, "I once did you a great injustice, an injustice I can never repair. It was not wholly my fault. I was—misled."

Her voice changed and deepened with this last word. Edward turned and saw her face clearly illumined by the taper burning before her, and the trouble in it divided his heart like a sharp sword. But there was more than trouble in her face, there was

something he had never pictured upon those gentle features, a mingling of horror and indignation.

"Oh, Alice!" he cried, advancing towards her, "Alice!"

"Hush!" she replied, waving him back. "Do you know what this means? He was to have been my husband in a few days. He was my dearest friend."

He stopped, thunderstruck, not immediately perceiving that she was speaking of Gervase, but smitten through with the keen anguish in her voice.

"What have I done?" he asked. "Oh, Alice! you did not love *him*," he added, thinking that his coming had only plunged her into deeper, perhaps irreparable sorrow.

"You should have spoken that day in the garden," she continued, in a low, half-suppressed tone, "I had a right to know then. You *should* have spoken."

"How could I speak?" he returned in surprise. "He was dead. What passed was our secret. Paul has spoken now—but even ——" he stopped, he could not say that he had come that night only to save her from the misery of marrying a man so false as Gervase Rickman.

Alice had risen in her trouble and stood in the full blaze of the firelight. "This is the only home I have ever known!" she said, looking round the familiar room, and wringing her hands together in her desperate pain. "And though I did not love him, I trusted him. Oh! how I trusted that false man," she added.

She had not heard the door-bell ring, swift steps passing through the hall and up the echoing stair, and now, as she faced the door, she was startled to see it open and disclose the smiling and confident face of Gervase Rickman.

CHAPTER

FACE TO FACE.

BRIGHT visions passed before Gervase Rickman's mental gaze as he drove from the station in the chilly dusk, dreams in which love played a great part, but ambition a greater.

In winning Alice he had won the desire of his heart, a desire that would never have grown to such mighty proportions but for the difficulties which hedged it round. The wedding-day was so near now, that something of the coolness of certainty pervaded his thoughts of it; he had even got so far as to pity himself with a pity tinctured by self-commendation for the sacrifices his approaching marriage involved. He knew that he ought to look higher than Alice Lingard now; personally she was all that even his wife should be, but, although her family was superior to his, she brought him no aristocratic connections, such as he needed. The marriage might even hinder him from strengthening such connections as he had already formed, while, as for her little fortune, which had once been so desirable an object to him, it would scarcely make any difference to a man whose successful financial operations were daily assuming grander, though more perilous proportions. His marriage was indeed a most virtuous act. Alice was not so young as she had been; life had taken the freshness from her beauty, such as it was, and stamped her features with an indelible record. Yet he well knew that beauty had never been her greatest charm, but rather an inward something, which, when it touched men's hearts, bound them to her with irresistible force; a certain air about her, a way of moving, smiling, speaking, or being silent, which filled the surrounding atmosphere with grace, and forged adamantine chains about the souls of her lovers. Virtue, in Rickman's case as in others, would bring its own reward. For a deep, seldom-heard whisper from the very depths of his heart told him that while he clave to Alice he had not quite done with his better nature; if he let her go, he would part with the last restraints of conscience, a thing, it must be confessed, which is a terrible inconvenience in a career of political ambition.

That ambition, insatiable as it was, nevertheless was in a fair

way of being gratified. Scarcely a year had passed since he was returned for Medington, yet he had effected much, especially during the recent battle over the Conservative Reform Bill. In and out of the House he had done yeoman's service, recognized as such by the leaders of the Opposition. He had been ubiquitous; attending and speaking at meetings here and meetings there, adding fuel to the fire of political agitation, which at that time blazed fiercely enough, and he had been particularly useful at a bye-election in which his party won a seat. Mrs. Walter Annesley had renewed many of her former aristocratic acquaintances in late years, and had given him excellent introductions, of which he had made the best use. He was well adapted for climbing the social ladder; he had good manners, tact and observation, fluent speech and ready wit, and was absolutely impervious to the impertinence of social superiors, when it suited his purpose, otherwise a person whom it was on the whole wise to respect. He was a brilliant speaker, his voice daily improved, and no amount of labour exhausted him.

Thus, with a long vista of political success opening brightly before him, and the prospect of domestic happiness filling the near distance, Gervase drove up to the door of his father's house that autumn evening, and, knowing the family habits by heart, went lightly up the stairs to the drawing-room, where he thought to find Alice alone.

When he opened the door and saw her standing with that strange look and despairing gesture in the mingled lights of the fire and the solitary taper, though something in her aspect gave him a shock, he supposed her to be alone; it was only when she spoke that he made out the dark figure of Edward Annesley confronting her in the dimmer light of the further part of the room.

"Gervase," Alice said, gazing full upon him without any salutation or preliminary whatever, "when I told you on the down that day that I had refused Edward Annesley solely because of what you witnessed on the banks of the Doubs six years ago, why did you tell me that I was *quite right?*"

These two syllables, which had so often echoed painfully through his conscience, were uttered with so keen an incisiveness that they cut into him like knives. Even his ready resource and iron nerve failed him for the moment, and he stood speechless, looking involuntarily from her to Annesley, as if for a solution of the enigma. The latter returned his gaze with a stern unbending contempt that failed to sting him in the anæsthesia which paradoxically results from such excessive pain as Alice's look gave him.

"Why," continued Alice, with a passionate scorn which told all the more from its contrast with her usual demeanour, "did you tell me that afternoon on the scene of Paul's death, that it would be to Edward Annesley's discredit to reveal what actually occurred?"

"Discredit," he returned, recovering his self-command, and taking refuge in a quibble, "was not the word, if I remember rightly. We are not alone, my dear Alice; you seem to be a little upset."

She looked at him with increasing contempt. "Why," she continued, "did you assure me that Edward Annesley loved your sister and had never more than a passing fancy for me?"

"My dear child, do consider times and places a little. If I told you that, it was doubtless because I believed it. I was not alone in taking that view of the situation."

"Why," she went on, "did you persuade Edward Annesley that I loved his cousin?"

"I was not alone in that opinion, either," he replied with a forced smile. "Captain Annesley," he added, "perhaps you will do me the favour of going into another room. Miss Lingard, as you perceive, is not in a condition to receive visitors."

"Quite so," Edward replied, taking his hat, "I will choose another time to finish my interview with Miss Lingard. My presence," he added with unwonted sarcasm, "must be excessively embarrassing."

"No, Captain Annesley," said Alice, in the same incisive tones, "you will not leave this room. While you are here, that man, false as he is, dares not deny the truth of what I say."

Gervase turned very pale, and all the sweetness seemed to vanish out of his life for ever. It was difficult to vanquish this resolute spirit, but he had the gift of knowing when he was beaten. He recognized the hard fact that nothing, not even his strong imperious will, could now win Alice back. He heard the knell of all his better aspirations in her words.

"Stay, Captain Annesley," he said quietly, "since Miss Lingard wishes it; though lovers' quarrels are not usually conducted in public. Perhaps, Alice, I may be permitted to ask why these reproaches are suddenly hurled at me in the presence of a third person?"

"Because that person has suffered the most from the web of falsehood and intrigue you have been weaving all these years," she replied.

"And he has come to complain to you," returned Gervase. "Don't you think, Annesley, it would have been more manly, to

say the least of it, to tax me openly with whatever you have against me?"

"I have taxed you with nothing," he replied. "I came here with the intention of replying to a question Miss Lingard asked me some years ago, but have not found it necessary to do so. I have simply handed her a letter which explained all she wished to know."

"You were in the confidence of both cousins," continued Alice, "and you abused the confidence of both. You were in my confidence, and you abused that."

"By loving you and purposing to make you my wife."

"Which you will never do," she replied, drawing a ring from her finger, and giving it to him.

Edward, who, since Gervase's request to him to leave the room, had been divided between the feeling that the request was reasonable and a desire to protect Alice, whose wish that he should stay showed a certain fear of being alone with a man so treacherous, now decided that the only becoming course for him was to go. He had already reached the door, when Sibyl, who had just been informed of her brother's arrival, opened it and came in.

"Captain Annesley!" she exclaimed, expecting to see Gervase only. "Oh! Gervase—Why, what is the matter, Alice?" she added.

"Dear Sibyl," replied Alice, suddenly calming to more than her wonted gentleness, "we have just had a severe shock. Paul Annesley is not dead."

"Not dead!" replied Gervase. "Why, I saw him die. Alice, you do not know what you are saying."

"It is quite true," added Edward; "he was swept out of sight and washed ashore alive. I have seen him. He will probably be in England before long. He has become a Roman Catholic, and entered a religious order, and a great deal has to be done before he can obtain permission to visit his mother, as he wishes to do."

Sibyl listened with eager interest, as if her life depended on Edward's words, and then on a sudden she burst into tears. "Oh! Edward," she sobbed, "the truth must come out now and your name will be cleared for ever. I always knew that this hour would come."

"You always believed in me, Sibyl," Edward replied with a slight quiver in his voice, while taking the hand she frankly offered; "I think I never had a truer friend. I only care really for what my friends think of me."

Sibyl only smiled her gentle smile in reply, though she did not

quickly recover her calm, and Alice looked at them with a strange expression not devoid of reproach.

"This is nonsense," said Gervase; "if Paul Annesley didn't die, why in the world should he disappear?"

"He was tired of his life," Edward replied.

"He thought," Alice was explaining, "to make atonement to the friend he had injured——"

"Alice," interrupted Edward, "that is our secret, remember, between us two and Mr. Gervase Rickman."

"It will soon be no secret," she replied; "that is why Paul is coming to England, as he tells me in his letter."

"The whole story is incredible," said Gervase impatiently. "Do you mean to say that Paul Annesley is a monk? He will have some difficulty in proving his identity here. No one who knew him would believe anything so preposterous. Paul of all men in the world to turn monk indeed! Some monk is humbugging you, Annesley, for the sake of getting the property. Besides," he added, "no religious order would receive a man without a pension."

"He was not without money," Edward explained. "The diamonds we saw at Neufchâtel were in his possession. Altogether he had about a thousand pounds, as well as professional knowledge which would be useful to a friar."

Yet Rickman believed the story. A letter from Paul alone and nothing that Edward could have told her, accounted for Alice's strange behaviour to himself. The superscription of the letter was shown him, and he admitted that it was a good imitation of Paul Annesley's handwriting.

He then left the room ostensibly to tell the news to his father, who was happily absorbed in his favourite studies and ignorant of all that was passing.

Edward had yet to break the intelligence to Mrs. Walter Annesley, for she had refused to admit him when he called that afternoon. He hoped to get an interview in the evening, and was hurrying off for the purpose of making another trial.

"I broke my news too roughly," he said in wishing Alice goodnight, for his hard manner to her vanished after her stormy reception of Gervase. "It was not a pleasant duty, and that spoils the temper," he explained.

Alice looked down, then she looked up with her eyes clouded with tears. "I owe it to you," she faltered, "to tell you all—how I came to misjudge you. But not now."

"Some day," he replied with increasing gentleness, "you shall tell me. When you feel inclined."

"Alice," Sibyl asked when he was gone, "what led you to misjudge him? There is some mystery behind this."

Alice took Sibyl's bright face in her hands and kissed it with a tenderness that almost surprised her.

"Never ask, Sibyl," she replied; "let me as well as others have the benefit of your loyal trust. You are the best friend *I* ever had or ever shall have."

A few minutes later Alice was in the hall, pacing restlessly to and fro, and trying to collect the fragments of her shattered world, when Gervase issued from his father's study, closing the door behind him, and approaching her.

"I shall return to town at once," he said, thus relieving her from a great embarrassment; "I have told my father that I found a telegram awaiting me here."

"It is plain that we cannot be under the same roof again," she replied.

"You will never forgive me," he added gloomily. "Jacob was never forgiven for stealing *his* blessing, though he got the blessing nevertheless. You asked me why I deceived you, Alice," he added, his voice deepening and touching her in spite of the loathing with which his perfidy inspired her. "It was because I loved you with such a love as men seldom feel. I cannot tell when it began—years before either of the Annesleys thought of you; it never faltered—never. You never had and you never will have a more constant and devoted lover——"

"Oh, hush, Gervase!" she sobbed, "do you think I am made of stone? Were you not my only brother and best friend? Are you not your mother's son? Can you not think what a bitter thing it is to have to think ill of you, to know of your cruel falseness?"

"No," he interrupted quickly, "I cannot; you are stone in comparison with me. You can never even picture such a passion as mine to yourself, cold, hard, immaculate woman that you are!"

"Gervase!"

"Listen, Alice," he said, collecting himself and curbing the fierce passion in his voice. "You have three lovers, and, woman-like, will probably choose the worst. Of these three, one attempted murder for the love of you; one lied for your sake, though not for your sake alone, for Sibyl's happiness was at stake; and one"—here he smiled a sarcastic smile—"he who saw and loved you the latest did not think it worth while so much as to clear himself from a dreadful imputation for your sake. Which of these three, think you, loved you the best?"

"He who loved honour and loyalty more," replied Alice, proudly and without hesitation.

"And he proved it when he offered himself to another woman who had the good sense to reject the cold-blooded——"

"Hush, Gervase! things are bitter enough already," Alice broke in; "do not embitter them more by idle words. Let us part in peace."

"Peace!" echoed Gervase with a scornful laugh. And he looked at the hearth fire in silence awhile.

When he spoke again his mood was altered.

"Alice," he said gently, "do not let Sibyl despise me."

"I will tell her nothing that I can avoid to your discredit, Gervase," she replied.

"I have said nothing of breaking off our engagement yet. Put it as you please, but do not break with them, if you can help it. I hope you will not leave them; my father ages visibly. We might part with a mutual conviction that we were unsuited to each other," he added with a sardonic smile.

So they agreed, and then Rickman's carriage drove up, and Mr. Rickman and Sibyl came into the hall to see him off.

"Good-bye, Alice," he said in his usual quiet manner, when he had parted with his father and sister.

"Good-bye," she replied in a faint far-off voice.

She stood on the steps and watched the carriage till its lights diminished to points, and were finally swallowed up in the dense dark night; while Gervase looked back at the graceful figure standing in the fan-shaped light streaming from the open hall, till the bend of the road swept it from him, and his heart ached with a heavy despair.

Ambition, wealth, success, power—all was now nothing without Alice.

CHAPTER V.

RESTORATION.

If one could picture the feelings with which a disembodied soul, reclothed in the frail garment of its mortality, would revisit the scenes of its earthly life, one might form some idea of the sensations which thrilled the heart of Paul Annesley, when, after setting in motion the machinery necessary to permit any irregularity in the life of a friar, he found himself in England, clad once more in the long disused and almost forgotten personality which he had put off when, to use his own expression, he left the world. Brother Sebastian, using another language, thinking other thoughts, deprived of name and fame and liberty, not only of action, but in a certain degree of thought, branded as it were with the tonsure, and dressed in a garb which further stamped him as one set apart from common human interests, having voluntarily undergone a punishment more severe than any inflicted on the vilest criminal prisoner in civilized states; this poor, mortified, unmanned, if you will, and certainly half unhumanized Sebastian, who yet enjoyed a peace Paul Annesley had never known—albeit a peace too deep, too like an opium-trance to be wholesome and natural—had become a familiar friend, while that fiery-hearted, undisciplined Paul was a stranger, and the once familiar faces which surrounded that Paul and his once familiar habits and thoughts were even more strange to Sebastian.

It needed no little courage in one so disaccustomed to personal freedom and so weaned from the stir and friction of ordinary life, once more to face the world, especially in a land of heretics; but Sebastian, after five minutes' conversation with his cousin, whom he had questioned as to his life with an eager rapidity that soon laid the whole situation bare to him, was too firmly convinced of the immediate necessity for repairing the wrong he had unintentionally committed to hesitate an instant. The duty was equally obvious to his Superior fortunately, since the Superior was the spring that set in motion the cogs and wheels of the machinery which effected his brief escape to the world.

In this dear little self-complacent island of ours, where to see a

nun was till late years the rarest occurrence, and where the garb of a monk is almost unknown, we have fallen into a pleasant habit of assuming that these cloistered lives have passed away with the shadows, sorrows, and discomforts of the middle ages. Some of us have a hazy notion that printing, steam, electricity, and the latest scientific dogma have put an end to all that, and that the prophecy of Victor Hugo's printer, who looked from his press to Notre Dame and said, "Ceci tuera cela," is fulfilled, in spite of the fact that this grand building, the imperfect symbol of a faith that cannot die, still stands as it has stood for ages, though many revolutions have rushed past it in bloody waves and it has more than once echoed to the clang of the invader's arms.

Yet these phases of religious feeling still exist; unoffending monks and nuns are just as real, though not such insufferable nuisances, as the frantic Salvationers who make day and night hideous with profane bawlings in our streets; monks and nuns are in fact content to plague only themselves and leave their neighbours in peace. Thus when Medington folk saw a gentleman in ordinary clerical attire, with shaven face and a skull cap beneath his hat, and were told that this was a veritable friar, the thing seemed to them like a fairy-tale, more especially when they were bid to recognize in this calm clergyman the familiar form and face of Paul Annesley, that smart and gay young doctor with the black-bearded face, the ready speech, and genial though stately manners they once knew; and many were inclined to doubt until they spoke to him. Even then it was an eerie thing to hear the voice of a man so long reckoned among the dead, and whose sole visible link with his former self appeared to be a scar on the face; a man who had so closely followed the counsel of Thomas à Kempis as to have literally stamped out his passions as we stamp out flames,—briefly, to have killed his veritable self, leaving little more than a husk of acquired habit behind.

He remained some time in England, for he had much to do; and not only in the little world of Medington, but also in London and at Chatham, where his cousin was stationed and where he visited him, the two appeared constantly together, so that the old scandal, which had embittered almost every relation in Edward's life for so many years, was publicly put to death and done away with for ever. It was now clear that Paul Annesley had not even been killed, much less murdered; it was equally clear that he would not be on terms of such intimacy with a man who had tried to compass his death. The fact of his burying himself in a cloister gave a motive, however crazy, for his disappearance, and disposed people to believe that his desperate leap into the Doubs

was voluntary and probably suicidal in intention. There were many theories on the subject, but the most generally accepted was that a sudden bound from poverty to wealth had developed the hereditary tendency to insanity, a tendency further aggravated by the fatal woman known to be the cause of all human disaster. The woman's name varied, but on the whole was unknown. It had been said from the first that Rickman knew more than he cared to say upon the matter, there had even been a doubt as to whether he had not borne false witness in the court of probate when giving the evidence of Paul's disappearance and supposed death, necessary to obtain probate of his will. Although there was still a mystery concerning both Edward's whereabouts at the moment of his cousin's disappearance and his obstinate silence upon the subject, the mystery was no longer interpreted to his discredit.

Edward Annesley did not accomplish his pious intention of breaking the news of her son's restoration to Mrs. Annesley, since that inflexibly vindictive woman resolutely continued to shut the door in his face. The task was therefore transferred to Alice Lingard, who fulfilled it with the tenderness and tact to be expected of her.

When the fact that her son lived finally burst upon Mrs. Annesley, she seemed stunned and sat silent for a long time.

"If he lives," she said at last; "why is he not here?"

"It is a long story," Alice replied, half-frightened at the absence of joy, or any other emotion on the mother's part. "He was—unhappy——"

"Why was my son unhappy?" asked Mrs. Annesley, fixing a cold and terrible regard upon Alice.

"His letter will tell you," replied Alice, trembling inwardly.

"Give me that letter."

"It is in Edward Annesley's possession——"

"A forgery of his—I curse the day that young man entered this house," she cried, going white with anger.

Alice tried to soothe her. "A great change has come over Paul," she said presently. "He is now very religious."

"That is indeed a change," his mother replied with involuntary sarcasm. "But why did he not return to me after his accident? Surely he could not have been imprisoned, kidnapped in a civilized country like France?"

"No," replied Alice, "he wished—he—entered a religious house."

"What do you mean, Alice Lingard?" she exclaimed in horror and agitation, "you cannot, dare not say that my son is a monk."

"Dear Mrs. Annesley, do not think of that; remember only,

that your son was dead and is alive again—that you will soon look upon his face——"

"Never," she cried, "never will I look upon the face of an apostate, an idolator, a shaven, craven fanatic. Better, ten thousand times better, he were in his grave—better anything than this. He is no son of mine—a Papist, a monk!"

"Your only son, your only child," Alice said reproachfully.

The woman was human after all, and burst into a passion of weeping painful to see, but less painful than the cold anger which went before and made Alice shudder to her heart's core.

Suddenly she stopped and turned upon Alice. "I see it all now. You did not love my son," she cried, "and that made him hate his life."

"No," she replied, "I never pretended to love him, save as a friend. I grieved for him when he was lost. I tried to supply his place to you."

"You drove him to despair, you robbed me of my only child," she cried; "the curse of a childless widow is upon you, Alice Lingard."

"Do not say such things; you will be sorry hereafter. The shock has overpowered you, you do not know what you are saying." Alice did not know how to comfort her, when she remembered that Paul was, after all, dead to the outside world.

Mrs. Annesley was silent, smiling a bitter smile, and Alice rose and left her for awhile, hoping that she would calm down. She herself needed the relief of solitude after this emotional strain, and going out into the garden, she sat beneath the yellowing linden-trees and gave way to tears.

She accused herself of having driven Paul Annesley to despair, she did not reflect that his own unbridled nature had done the mischief. She had spoilt three men's lives, and been the cause of guilt and misery unspeakable, though through no fault of her own. She could not love more than one—at least at a time; and she certainly could not marry more than one. She had loyally striven to suppress her own inclinations and make the most worthy of the three happy, and she had made them all miserable. She who could not bear to give pain, even when most necessary and salutary, seemed fated to mar instead of blessing the lives of the men who loved her. That these three men should set their hearts upon her was hard, and surely no fault of hers. It was not as if she was so very beautiful, she reflected; Sibyl was infinitely prettier and more pleasing; Sibyl charmed wherever she went with her grace and sparkle; but Sibyl did not kindle these deep and terrible passions in men's hearts.

Though she had certainly tried to bring herself to listen to each of them in turn, until each in turn had proved unworthy of a good woman's regard, she had never tried to attract either; ready as her sensitive conscience was to accuse herself and excuse others, she could not lay that to her charge, she knew well that she had none of the graceful and unconscious coquetry which was one of Sibyl's distinguishing charms; in her smallest actions as well as thoughts she was transparent and straightforward to a fault. It was true that she had resigned her heart to Edward too quickly, at least the world would say too quickly; for Alice knew in her inmost heart that women have less power than men to withhold their affections, and not more, as a brutal conventionality assumes; that the deepest and best attachments arise in this sudden and spontaneous way; but she had never tried to captivate him, had rather held aloof from him in her proud self-reverence. Why then had all this fallen upon her, why was she the evil fate in the three lives which were each in a way so dear to her?

When Alice had reached this point in her meditations, the sound of Daniel Pink's words returned to her mind, "It seemed that hard!" She saw the shepherd's weather-beaten face, its ruggedness subdued by a sublime trust; she thought of his hard life and many sorrows; she saw him watching his sheep in the frosty moonlight, as he had related, and the remembrance of what he had told her quieted the rising murmurs in her heart.

She rose and returned to Mrs. Annesley, bearing in mind the desolation and disappointments of a life that was too near the downward verge to have much earthly hope, and prepared to suffer ingratitude and upbraiding in silence.

Mrs. Annesley finally consented to receive her prodigal in consequence of a letter Gervase Rickman wrote her. In this he condoled with her on the unfortunate turn Paul's religious feelings had taken, and made some observations on the zealous proselytism of the Romish Church, and of the esteem in which English perverts were held at the Vatican, using the names of Wiseman, Manning and Newman, to point his moral and adorn his tale. Instantly on reading this, Mrs. Annesley beheld a vision: she saw herself the mother of a cardinal, and relented.

Paul, daily besieged with tracts and masses of controversial literature, and bombarded by arguments which he heard chiefly in respectful and aggravating silence, passed some time beneath his mother's roof, scandalizing the maids by sleeping on the floor and using no linen, but otherwise conducting himself like an average Christian, save that he was always going to chapel on week-days. At his instance, Edward was also received by his stern aunt. But

she did not forgive him; the true history of his part in her son's virtual death made her hate him more bitterly than ever.

When Paul finally left England, his mother felt his loss even more severely than when she had supposed him dead; and, being no longer sustained by the prospect of vengeance, she gradually declined in health and died in the course of a few years.

Sebastian found most sympathy and comprehension in Edward. Though the latter did not doubt that Paul had done wrong in running away from the trouble he had brought upon himself, and wrong in renouncing the duties and responsibilities of his life, he saw that he could not turn back. Much as he disliked anything approaching to asceticism, he was inclined to think that a nature so fiery and so destitute of self-control needed the iron discipline of monastic rule, as a confirmed drunkard needs the restraint of an asylum, and the habit of total abstinence. Moderation seemed impossible to such a man. But these lenient views of monasticism were spasmodic and were held generally after conversations in which the friar had spoken with burning and eloquent enthusiasm of the joys of self-renunciation, of his hopes and aspirations, or the prospects held out to him of more active employment, in which his medical knowledge and other talents would be devoted to the service of men; and explained to him that friars differed from monks in combining the active with the contemplative life, a fact which was hard to drive into his obtuse Protestant understanding.

At those times it was impossible even for a practical hard-headed Englishman not to see that Friar Sebastian was a nobler being than Paul Annesley; though in cooler moments he thought with pity and regret of his lost friend, Paul, and was inclined to wish him back again, faults and all.

After an interview which Paul had with Alice in the Manor garden one day, he gave up striving to banish her from his thoughts, and suffered her to remain there till the last hour of his life. He was surprised and glad to find himself quite calm in her presence, and recognized that the terrible yearning which once so distracted him was quite dead, and succeeded by a pure and tender regard, so free from selfishness and so content with absence, that even one vowed to give up all human ties need fear nothing from it. He gave her a little crucifix, which she wore ever after, and his face at the end of that interview had a more humanly happy look than it had worn for years. When he returned to his community he was so changed by this painful but wholesome contact with the world that the brethren scarely knew him. From that time all austerities not imposed by the rule of

his order ceased, and he regained his former bodily and mental health. And if he regretted the vows he had taken, no human being ever knew.

Besides removing the imputation from his cousin's name, Paul had much to do to put him in possession of his property. First he had to prove his identity and come to life legally, which was a troublesome business; then he had to execute a voluntary conveyance, transferring the bulk of his landed property, which, as was mentioned before, was not entailed, to Edward Annesley, and a deed of gift by which his mother became the legal owner of such property as had been assigned her by his will; a portion of his property he reserved for himself as an Englishman, and yielded to the fraternity as a Dominican friar. Those who received him into the community had consented, in consideration of the peculiar circumstances—amongst them his condition that he could not take the vows if that involved touching the property he had renounced to his cousin—to be content with the small fortune he was then able to bring.

All these things, as will readily be imagined, were not effected without time and patience, and the aid of learned and expensive lawyers; the last circumstance is pleasant to reflect upon, because humane people like to think that somebody—if only a stray lawyer or so—is benefited by the chances and changes of this mortal life.

When, after that pleasant interview with Alice, Brother Sebastian went to the house to make his farewells to Sibyl and Mr. Rickman, Alice remained behind alone in the garden.

She was not a monk, but a young living woman, with a warm and tender heart, and what had passed between her and her former lover and present friend had stirred that heart to its depths. She wandered slowly along the garden paths, through the wicket to the meadow, until she found herself under the dark roof of the pine-trees, which swayed gently in low and solemn music above her head.

It was winter, and the quiet grey day was drawing to a close, the mild air taking a sharp edge as the sun sank. She paced the dry soft carpet of fir-needles, with her faithful dog by her side, and a growing happiness in her heart. Her youth had been troubled, and she had borne a heavy yoke in riper years; that yoke was now falling from her shoulders, and life, which had been so bewildering and difficult, began to show a clear and easy path for her weary feet—feet still young though so wearied by the stony mazes they had trodden.

Sibyl and Mr. Rickman had taken the breaking of her engage-

ment with Gervase more gently than she could have hoped; Sibyl had even said that she always regarded the match as a mistake on both sides; Mr. Rickman had comforted himself with the reflection that he should not lose her. But he no longer clung to Alice as he had done; he flung himself more now upon Sibyl, which, after all, was more natural and desirable. Sibyl's affection for Alice was as great as ever, but from that time Alice observed that a distance arose and gradually widened between the brother and sister; she supposed that Sibyl had some intuition of the truth, a suspicion increased by Sibyl's silence upon the relations which had existed between Gervase and herself.

The grey sky overhead broke into pearly fragments, tinted with gold and rose towards the west, where the glowing sunset seemed to have consumed the last speck of cloud; the fir-trunks looked incandescent in the warm glow; Alice's face was doubly transfigured with radiance from within and from without, while she thought of all that had passed, and how of the three caskets of lead, of silver and of gold, the best was hers, and listened to the tranquil country sounds, the hum of the threshing-machine in the yard below, the voice of the cowman calling the cows by name and trudging home with the last pails of milk, the evening song of the robin, pathetically cheerful, the cheery good-night of a labourer going homewards past the farm-yard.

Then she heard another and well-known footstep, beating quick even time on the lane which led by the meadow to the back of the house, and a well-known voice singing. The song stopped, for the singer caught sight of her figure over the hedge in the evening glow, and he went into the meadow instead of going to the house, whither, with the ostensible purpose of announcing the approaching marriage of his sister Eleanor with Major McIlvray, he was bound.

Alice turned towards him, the sunset clothing her in raiment of living light; they had scarcely met since the stormy evening when he brought Paul's message, and thus he had not heard the story she had then promised to tell him. It seemed but a moment from Edward's first sight of her figure in the evening glory till when he stood by her side beneath the soft murmurs of the pine-roof, thrilled through and through with exquisite happiness.

"Dearest Alice," he said, after some preliminary words had passed and he had read her heart in her face, "I think you are going to take me after all. I never could believe it possible that we should live apart, even when we were most parted. First tell me why you were so scornful to me. How in the world did you come to think me such a mean sneaking fellow? Some of Master Gervase's work, no doubt."

Alice looked distressed and turned her face towards the sunset behind the black hills, till her features were transfused and etherealized by the lucid glow.

"I wronged you," she replied, "and owe you some amends. Otherwise I would not speak of it."

He did not like this distressed look. "Why," he asked, "should you hesitate to expose one of the greatest scoundrels that ever breathed? Alice, you don't mean to say that you ever cared for that——"; he was obliged to stop for want of a sufficiently powerful epithet. "I know that he schemed and worried you into an engagement."

"I cared for him very much, and I promised his mother on her death-bed, but I never loved him," she replied.

"Well, poor fellow! after all it must have been a great temptation. My dearest Alice, you are quite sure that you never loved him?" he added with a relapse to anxiety.

Alice smiled, and Edward's heart again admitted extenuating circumstances in Gervase's case. She then gave him a brief but complete narrative of the manner in which Gervase had blinded her, had twisted circumstances and misrepresented events until she had been obliged, in spite of an underlying inner conviction to the contrary, to accept Edward's imputed guilt as truth. And whenever Edward's indignation rose to boiling-point, a look in Alice's face was sufficient to make him regard the delinquent with charity. But when, at his earnest request, she told him of the steps by which she had gradually been led into the engagement, Gervase once more became a villain of the deepest dye.

"But after all," he commented at the close of the recital, "he had a more thorough and lasting feeling for you than could be expected of such a scoundrel. And Paul cared only too much for you. It was more like infatuation with them; not that either of them ever loved you as I do and did from the very first. It is strange that a woman should have such power," he reflected after a pause; "it is not as if you were so unusually beautiful."

"Really!" Alice commented with an amused smile.

"Because," he added, surveying her with unmoved gravity, "you are not."

Yet the Alice before him to-night was not the worn and sorrowful woman he saw when he brought the tidings that Paul was alive. The beauty of youth, with something that youth, with all its graces, cannot have, had returned to the face upturned to him with a serious sweetness full of latent laughter. She was touched in turn by the change which had recently come over his face—

the grim defiant look of late years was gone, the old genial expression replaced it. Not Ulysses under the touch of Athene was more brightened than Edward now the burden had fallen from him. This changed look, with many subsequent hints from him, helped her to guess what he had suffered in silence, and made her feel that no devotion on her part would be too great to atone for what had gone by.

"No," he continued gravely, "it is not beauty alone. If you do but turn your head, one's heart must follow, and when you speak, it goes to the very centre of one's heart."

"And yet you wanted to marry Sibyl?"

"Dear Sibyl! That rascal might have let his sister alone. He persuaded me that her happiness was in danger, and that she, as well as others, had mistaken the nature of my friendship, and I was fool enough to believe him. Sibyl is one of the sweetest creatures I ever knew, Alice."

"It appears, after all, that you would have preferred Sibyl," Alice said, smiling.

"Dear Sibyl," he repeated gravely. "But," he added, turning to Alice again with a bright smile, "she won't have me. She told me that I was in love with you. She advised me to wait. She said you were worth waiting for. She ought to know."

Alice turned her face away and was silent.

"I think no one will ever know what *she* is worth," she said at last.

"We shall never have a better friend," he added; and Alice echoed his words in her heart.

The sun sank; all the glory of its setting melted into a warm violet tinge, filling the western sky, and making the dark hillside show darker than ever against the light; every sound was hushed save the tinkle of a distant sheep-bell; cottage windows glowed warmly in the village, showing where firesides were cheerful and suppers spread; white rime-crystals were beginning to sparkle on the cold grass, the stars had the keen brilliance of frost; wise people were indoors; yet these two lingered beneath the pines, unconscious of cold, until even Hubert's long-suffering came to an end, and his displeased whines recalled them from beatified cloudland to the solid earth.

Love begins in the warm morning of life, but does not end with it; though the music of birds is hushed, though evening chills come and hair is whitened by the frost of years, it is still warm and bright in the hearts of true lovers; there the sun always shines and the birds continually sing.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

"SHART of putten' of 'em underground, you caint never be zure on 'em," Raysh Squire observed concerning the re-appearance of Paul Annesley, against whom he had secretly borne a grudge ever since the irregular and unceremonious manner in which he left the world. "Once you've a got vour veet of solid earth atop of 'em, you med warnt they'll bide quiet. Buryen of mankind is a ongrateful traäde, but I hreckon there aint a surer traäde nowhere. Ay, a dead zure traäde is buryen," he added, not intending the grim pun.

These cheerful observations were part of Raysh Squire's contributions to the hilarity of the wedding party assembled in the great kitchen at Arden Manor to celebrate the marriage of Reuben Gale—who, after several winters spent in Algeria in the service of young Mrs. Reginald Annesley, had outgrown his consumptive tendency—with one of Daniel Pink's daughters, a housemaid at the Manor.

"Right you be, Raysh," replied Mam Gale, "'taint often work of yourn has to be ondone. They med be ever so naïsy avore, they bides still enough when you've adone with 'em."

"Pretty nigh so sure as marryen, your work is, Raysh," John Nobbs struck in with a view to divert conversation to livelier channels.

"Ay, marryen agen," continued Raysh, irritated by the assumption that marrying was not his work, "tain't nigh so zure as buryen; we've a-married many a man twice over in Arden church. There's wold Jackson, you minds he, Master Nobbs? Vive times we married en in Arden church, vive times over, to vive vine women buried alongside of en out in lytten. Dree on 'em was widows."

"I don't hold with so much marrying," observed the bridegroom, to whom these remarks were distasteful. "Once in a lifetime is quite enough for any man," he added with a profound sigh and a serious air.

"What! tired of it aready, Hreub?" inquired his grandmother;

and there was much laughter and rough joking at Reuben's expense.

"Marryen," observed Raysh, when people had exhausted their mirth and were again amenable to eloquence, "is like vrostës and east winds, powerful onpleasant it es, but you caint do without it in the long hrun."

"Come, Raysh," interrupted an old bachelor and noted misogynist of at least thirty, "speak for yourself."

"Yes, speak for yourself," echoed Reuben.

"You caint do without it," continued Raysh, scornfully ignoring these interruptions, "if you wants to make zure of a ooman. A wivveren sect they be. Shart of gwine to church with 'em and changing of their name, you caint be sure on 'em. Chop hround at the last minute they will. Look at Mrs. Annesley, Miss Lingard that was. John Cave had a-turned a coat hready for me to marry her to Mr. Gervase, and I'd a-bought a bran-new neck-cloth, and everything hready, and the church scoured from top to bottom. That was vour year ago come next Middlemass. Darned if I ever zeen Mr. Merten look onluckier than a did that day. 'Wedden,' he ses, 'there aint a-gwine to be no wedden, Raysh.' That was the first I yeard of it. Zimmed as though he'd a-knocked all the wind out of me when a zaid that. The ways of the women volk is that wivveren the best on 'em. A ondeniable sect is womankind, a ondeniable sect."

Here John Nobbs, who was at the head of the table, working steadily away at a mighty sirloin, observed that both parties had done better in the matrimonial lottery than if that wedding had taken place. "Misself," he said, "I never giv my consent to that match. 'They'll never goo in double harness,' I ses to misself, many a time when I zeen 'em together."

"Ah, Master Nobbs, I don't go with you," said Jacob Gale. "Mr. Gervase have a looked too high. Tis agen nature for a man to look up to his wife. Lady Sharlett comes of one of the highest vamilies in the land, and I warnt she'll make en mind that."

"Mis'able proud is Lady Sharlett," said the gardener. "She was out in gairden a good hour one day, and she took no more count of me than if I'd a ben a malleyshag."*

Here the discussion of Lady Charlotte's peculiarities was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Rickman and Sibyl, accompanied by Edward Annesley and Alice, the latter carrying the two-year-old heir of Gledesworth, whose birthday was being celebrated by a visit to Arden Manor, and a great drinking of healths ensued

accompanied by speech-making, in which Raysh Squire outdid himself, and the bridegroom endured a purgatory of stammers, blushes, and breakdowns.

"I cannot imagine," Sibyl remarked, when the ceremony was over and the family had left the kitchen for the garden, where they disposed themselves on various seats beneath the apple-trees, now in bloom, "why men, however sensible they may be, always look so foolish when being married."

"Don't you think they have cause, Sibyl?" Edward asked; "that a secret consciousness of their own folly——"

"Folly, indeed!" laughed Sibyl. "Now the brides would do well to look silly or else sad. Yet they never do. The shyest girl in the humblest class always wears a subdued air of triumph at her marriage. Human beings certainly are the oddest creatures."

Here Mr. Rickman expressed a wish, after a long dissertation concerning the gradual evolution of marriage rites from primitive times till now, with some remarks upon such customs as the bride presenting the bridegroom with a whip and the throwing of rice, to see this triumphant look upon Sibyl's face before long.

"My dear papa, don't you think I look triumphant enough as it is?" she replied. "I exult in freedom; let others hug their chains. Besides, I have you to tyrannize over, so what do I want with a husband to plague?"

She looked radiant enough, if not triumphant, as she stood beneath the crimson apple-blossoms, with the dappled sun-lights dancing over her, tossing the laughing boy above her curly head, her dark eyes sparkling and the rich tints glowing in her cheeks. "Marriage," she would sometimes say, in answer to such observations as this of Mr. Rickman's, "is not one of my foibles. I like my brother-men and cannot bring myself to make any of them miserable. And I like Miss Sibyl Rickman and her peace of mind, and I like to write what I think, which I could not do if married. Besides, what in the world would people do if there were no old maids?"

Edward and Alice knew that they would have been the poorer for her marriage, though they often wished it. Both were certain that she had conquered the early feeling which at one time threatened to make shipwreck of her happiness, and this certitude made their constant intercourse with Sibyl very happy.

Alice had wished not to live at Gledesworth. She did not care for the state and circumstance of the great house, and was oppressed by its traditions. She would rather have left the property with Paul, to be absorbed by his community, or passed it on to

the next brother, but Edward soon convinced her that such schemes were impracticable, that responsibilities cannot be evaded, and finally that it was their duty to live, as much as his military life permitted, at Gledesworth, which had now become a charming home, the resort of a wide circle of friends and kinsfolk.

What with the provision for Paul's mother, and the slice taken out for the Dominicans, the Gledesworth estate was so diminished that they were not overburdened with riches, and had to use some economy to meet the charges entailed by the possession of land. As for the hereditary curse, Annesley laughed that to scorn, and had many a merry battle of words with Sibyl upon the subject. The distich,* he argued, proved, if anything, its own falsity, since Reginald Annesley's affliction ought to have broken the spell, which nevertheless continued to work upon two successive heirs after him. But Sibyl maintained that Paul has broken the spell in the Dominican convent. Very likely Reginald had been immured in a brick building, she would affirm with profound gravity.

"Your godson, Sibyl," Edward said, taking the boy from her arms, "will die when it pleases God, not before. And if he does not live to inherit Gledesworth, it will not be because a widow cursed his ancestors centuries ago. It may be from his own fault or folly, indeed, though he is too like his mother to have many faults. Poor Reuben's children, I grant you, may inherit a curse." And so he thought, will Gervase's, but theirs will be the curse of a crooked nature.

Gervase Rickman was then actually walking along the grey-green ridge of down which rose behind the Manor against the pale April sky. Business had called him unexpectedly to Medington, which he still represented, and, leaving his carriage in the high road, with instructions to wait at the Traveller's Rest, he descended the slope and walked over the springy turf, looking down upon Arden and its familiar fields and trees, and upon the very garden where Alice and Sibyl were making cowslip-balls for the baby Annesley. The changeable April day clouded over as he walked and gazed; the blush of vivid green died from the trees and copses; the plain darkened and the shadows in the hill-sides deepened. The song birds were silent; the melancholy wail of a plover drew his attention to a single bird, fluttering as if wounded before him, and trying in its simple, pathetic cunning to draw his attention away from the nest which that very cry betrayed.

* "Whanne ye lord ys mewed in stonen celle,
Gledesworthe thanne shalle brake hys spelle,"

On the bleak March day when he waited on that down outside the Traveller's Rest for Alice, he had thought much of the omnipotence of human will, and purposed to mould mankind to his own ends. Then he was an obscure country lawyer, nursing an unsuspected ambition in the depths of his heart. Now his name was in every one's mouth; he had climbed more than one step towards the height he intended to scale. The minister whose patronage had so early been his was now in office. He had approved himself to his party as a useful and almost indispensable instrument, particularly by the services he had rendered in the last general election which restored the Liberals to power. His financial skill was beginning to be recognized, his name had weight in financial society, which he affected. Everything he touched turned to gold. By his marriage with Lady Charlotte he was connected with half the peerage and was son-in-law to a minister. Lady Charlotte, it is true, was neither so young as she had been, nor so beautiful as she might have been, nor was she well-dowered. She was known to have a tongue and suspected of having a temper; but she was a woman who knew the world both of politics and of society, and was the most useful wife a man in his position could possibly have. His ambition, great as it was, was being more rapidly gratified than even he had expected. He had gained the world, and lost his soul.

But to-day he no longer believed in the omnipotence of will and energy. He looked down upon the roofs of Arden and thought of the severe check his will had received there; he thought, too, of the unexpectedly favourable conjunction of affairs for him in other respects, and acknowledged another power, which he called destiny. What would the first Napoleon have done, he mused, in peaceful England at this end of the nineteenth century? If he had missed the Crimea and the Mutiny, he might have risen to be a half-pay officer; had he been in time for those crises, he might have been reckoned an excellent general, nothing more.

Beyond the unseen sea behind the hills rising before Rickman's eyes lay a country occupied by a hostile army and torn by revolution. Why had not destiny placed him there, where the hour was come, but not the man to rule it? An eager fancy could almost hear the far-off thunder of the war fitfully raging beyond that little strip of sea, over whose quiet waters he actually heard the boom of English guns, fired only in peaceful practice, not at masses of living men. There, in the world's beautiful pleasure city, an agony beyond all the agonies of war was slowly wearing

itself out through these pleasant spring months, an agony then hidden within the walls of Paris beleaguered by her own children, and never fully to be known. Gervase Rickman gave a passing thought to that tragedy and foresaw the flames and indiscriminate slaughter in which it was before long to terminate, when the Seine literally ran with French blood shed by French hands, the tragedy of an unbridled mob fitfully swayed by one or two fanatics in possession of a great city, and he wondered at the weakness of those who ought to have ruled.

Though he still believed more in men than in institutions, and scorned weakness above everything, he did not believe as he had done that day by the Traveller's Rest; his ambition had now risen from the vague of golden visions into the clearness of reality, and he could see how low was the highest summit within his reach. Yet it was the sole object of his life, he cared for nothing else. The human side of his character was paralyzed on the day when he lost Alice. It was not only that all his better instincts and nobler aspirations died the moment his life was cut off from all tender feelings and sundered from the purer influences of hers, but in losing her he had to a certain extent lost Sibyl, and drifted away from those earlier and stronger ties which begin with life itself. Sibyl, the second good genius of his life, was never again on the old terms with him. Whenever they met there was an invisible, impassable barrier between them; perhaps she knew all and despised him, as he knew, Alice despised him.

All his life long, through wealth and power and gratified ambition, he was to bear about the heavy pain of having lost not Alice only, but her respect, of having won not her love but her bitter scorn. He looked down upon the Manor, where she was so frequent a guest that he never went there himself without a previous intimation, lest they should meet, as it was tacitly understood they could not, and he yearned for the old days to live again, that he might act differently. Since he was fated not to win her heart, which he saw clearly now was beyond human volition, he might still have been able to look in her face and see the old tender friendly look in her eyes; and yet had he remained true to his better self, he could never have succeeded as he was to succeed when freed from scruples and rid of the importunities of conscience. He would have lost the world and saved his soul alive.

For some moments the old yearning returned with such force at the sight of the pleasant paths in which they had wandered together, that he thought he would have been content to remain

all his life in that quiet spot, an obscure country lawyer, with Alice by his side, with his old father to care for and Sibyl to take pride in. Not that he did not now take great pride in Sibyl and her increasing literary reputation, but it would have been different if the dark shadow had not come between them. But Lady Charlotte, who had been his wife four months, did not like Arden. Mr. Rickman bored her, she was afraid of Sibyl and looked down upon them all; he knew that she would put them farther and farther asunder and himself farther and ever farther from his nobler nature.

He leant upon the gate by which he was standing with Alice on that summer evening, when he uttered those two fatal words, "quite right," and reviewed all that episode in his life, the inclination first springing from a sordid thought of Alice's fortune, then fostered by the charm of her daily society, and strengthened by the strong purpose with which he pursued every aim, until it became a ruling passion, the frustration of which tore away one-half of his character. He had played skilfully and daringly, and he had lost through no folly, for who could dream that a man would rise from the dead to frustrate him? Will, skill, and fate were to him the sole rulers of things human. He did not recognize that nothing can stand which is not built upon the eternal foundations of truth and justice.

Nevertheless, as he continued to gaze on the old paternal fields in which he had passed his boyhood and youth, a vague regret for what he might have been, had he been only true to himself, rose and mingled with the piercing sense of loss and moral humiliation, which never wholly left him, and he turned from Arden and walked on. Now his face was towards Gledesworth, which lay unseen behind the down, and he gave one jealous passionate thought to the life Alice was living there with Edward Annesley, who was now no more shunned or shadowed by the reproach of an unproved accusation, and yet another thought to the strange death in life of Paul Annesley.

And just then the coast guns boomed over the peaceful waters again, recalling his thoughts to the tragedy beyond the sea. The group in the garden below heard the same low thunder, and Sibyl made some jesting allusion to the Annesley gun, which had just been triumphantly tested at Shoeburyness; and Edward thought of the deadly earnest with which French cannon were being fired on the other side of that sunny sea.

They did not know that, just then, under the walls of Paris, while some men wounded after a repulse were being placed in an ambulance, a shot from the fort behind them struck a friar

who was in the act of lifting the last man, and killed him on the spot.

The wounded man groaned when his living support gave way, but other hands raised him, and the ambulance moved away from the dangerous spot, leaving the dead man behind in their haste. He was one of those Dominicans, who, from the first outbreak of the war, had been in the field with the French armies. In disengaging the slain friar from the man he was lifting, they had turned him so that he lay face upwards, his arms outstretched as in the restful slumber of youth, his white dress stained crimson over the breast, his eyes closed to the spring sunshine, his scarred face wearing the sweet and peaceful smile often seen in the soldier killed in battle.

Thus Paul Annesley's troubled soul passed heroically to its rest.

Though they could not know what was happening beyond the sea, a vague sadness in keeping with the sudden overclouding of the spring day filled the hearts of those to whom the slain man had been dear, a sadness which passed like the cloud itself.

Even Gervase Rickman felt the passing gloom, and shaking off the gentler memories of his life, and walking quickly over the sunny turf where the scattered sheep were feeding, he reached the sign-post beneath which he was standing when Edward Annesley came singing by years ago. There his carriage was waiting by the Traveller's Rest, and he sprang into it and was quickly whirled out of sight.

The little group at Arden Manor were tranquilly sitting beneath the apple-trees. Mr. Rickman, forgetful of coins and antiquities, was patiently weaving daisy-chains for little Paul, who called him grandfather, and whom he loved more than the little Rickmans who came after him; Alice was relating the family news—the expected visit of her mother-in-law and Harriet to Gledesworth, the probability that Major McIlvray and Eleanor would follow them; Wilfrid's chances of promotion and his intention to marry; the appointment of Jack, the youngest Annesley, to a ship, and the recent visit they had paid to Mrs. Walter Annesley, who was growing weaker day by day; the probability of Edward's retiring from active service.

The shadows lengthened and the Annesleys went back to their pleasant home. Sibyl returned to the wedding party, led the dancing and listened to the singing, and saw the bride and bridegroom start for their new home at the falling of the dusk.

When she was sitting by the hearth with her father that night she mused on the different ways in which human lives are ordered.

As days of brilliant sunshine and blue skies are rare in England, so are lives of full and unclouded happiness in this world; but there are many sweet neutral-tinted days full of peace, in which plants grow and birds sing, and the clouds break away into soft glory at sunset. Sibyl's life was like one of these serene days; it was happy and by no means unfruitful.

THE END.

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